

## **SECTION 1 - STEPPINGSTONES**

### **CHAPTER 1            ON MY WAY**

I was blind. I could no more see what was in front of me as I could see into the future. Snow slanted and sideways obscured my vision. Everything was some gradient of gray.

I sat on the edge of my seat with a tight grip on the wheel. The extent of my vision was a 4 inch diameter hole I had wiped with my gloved hand.

If I peered into the storm too hard, I felt as if I was being hurled into warp speed like on Star Trek, with all the stars whipping by. But at the same time it did not feel like I was moving at all, creating an intense sensation of vertigo.

Why hadn't they canceled the interview? I asked myself for the umpteenth time that hour. 6 inches of snow had fallen and 10 were predicted. I was heading into the City of Watertown. Everyone else was going in the other direction.

Driving in the slow lane at 35 miles per hour gives you time to think. I was wondering what the hell I was doing. I was hungry. Hungry for money and opportunity. And hungry for food. I needed to get a better job, and soon as I was not currently able to make a living.

I was gambling. My plan was to cashing in my chips as a full time college student, drop down to a few classes and go part time while I worked full time. I needed a better paying job than the one I had. I was making a measly \$4.40/hr working in a group home for 10 people with mental retardation. I was gambling on this job and I was willing to risk the storm.

Watertown was a post-industrial city of about 80,000. In its hay day it had been a hub of manufacturing, a mechanical city rusting on the banks of a brown river. They say the river had once caught fire. Now the brass it turned out was merely some ornamental decoration and Watertown had fallen into a long sleep.

In adversity there is opportunity and jobs to help triage the inner city blight were becoming plentiful. It was 1985.

I didn't even want this particular job. It didn't quite sound like my cup of tea, but I was desperate. I would have shoveled horse poop if I had to. My future seemed as bleak as the storm. Faced with going to school part time and with a poor paying job I could see things going nowhere fast. There is something about going for a job interview in a raging blizzard that does not bode well for success. Still I pressed on, holding tightly onto the wheel and onto the notion that this misadventure would pay some dividends.

Finally I came to my exit. I did not know my way around these city streets. I had grown up a suburban kid and the city, even this small one, was un-chartered territory. The directions seemed good however, and the heavy snow was keeping most sane people safely behind close doors. Soon I was inching my way down streets wheel high filled with stuff that looked like dirty flour, searching the gray hulks of boarded up buildings for a clue or a sign of life.

The buildings all looked like tombstones, a mute testament to another time. One building had some cars parked in front of it. The front door opened and a figure wrapped tightly in their coat stepped out and into the storm. I figured this had to be the place, and it was.

At one point a sign on the building had read "City of Watertown Water Department". But the letters were long gone, only their shadows remained in stark relief on the aging brick. No other

signs be told what lay beyond its metal door and darkened windows. I pulled into the parking lot and up against a broken down chain link fence. As I got out, I wondered whether or not I would actually get to leave this place or if I would be stuck. The prospect of having to stay a moment longer than necessary here filled me with dread.

I was suddenly faced with a more immediate problem however. How did I get in? There were several doors and none of them looked all too inviting. The nearest door had some sort of intercom, so I thought I would give that one a try. I pushed the button.

I waited what seemed like an un-anxious period of time. I was just about to push the button again when the door began to creak. It opened slowly like the front door of the Munsters house on that old TV show. I poked my head around the corner.

It was dark on the other side of the door. I looked down and noticed a wizened old woman with graying blonde hair and a cigarette burned down to almost all ash. She croaked, "Can I help you"?

I stuttered my name and my reason for being there and the door opened yet further. I had never been to a homeless shelter before. I did not know what to expect. My first sight was a sign explaining the rules. The shelter opened at 8pm. All Guests (and it said guests) must sign in, submit to a search, and shower. Anyone intoxicated, possessing drugs or alcohol or weapons would be asked to leave. It sounded reasonable enough to me.

On the left wall were several colorful pictures of Jesus doing His godly duties and on the right wall was a desk with a glass partition. Otherwise it was fairly Spartan. The old woman who answered the door coughed her name and I winced behind her back as I did not catch what she said. We walked down the hallway and passed through rooms stacked high with beds. I tried to ask an intelligent question, such as how many beds do you have here? Her response was exhaled with the next cloud of smoke and I missed the answer too. All the time she kept on moving, she never turned around as I followed her back.

It was dark inside the shelter as most of the lights were off. We headed to a flight of stairs that had light at least emanating from the top. She gestured up the stairs, coughed once more and turned away. I paused to watch her go, now questioning how I would get out of this place, as it was quite maze-like. The woman never turned around. I went up the stairs.

On the second floor there was more activity. There were several offices, some with the lights on but the door closed and others with the doors open but I did not see anyone in them. I kept on walking until I heard the sound of activity. A door on the right seemed possessing an occupant. I tentatively poked my head inside. A woman sat with her back towards me. She wore a brightly colored floral dress in stark contrast to the environment I had heretofore experienced. She turned as I stepped fully into the doorway.

"Hello", I said, "my name is Scott Whittaker and I am looking for Mary Petty". Her face lit up into a big smile as she bounced up from her chair. "Hi" she said, and she grasped my hand warmly. She was a not unattractive woman in her mid forties with curly shoulder length black hair. "It is a pleasure to meet you", she said, exchanging the required pleasantries. "I hope you made it here alright". This was her only acknowledgement of the life-threatening ride I had just had. "Yes, but the roads are getting quite treacherous. I am surprised that you still wanted to meet with me on such a day as this", I replied, perhaps too honestly. She shook her head knowingly, "We are on a bit of a tight time frame, and we hope to have all the interviews completed this

week”. “We have hired two people already and we just have two more positions to fill”. She motioned to a folding chair and asked me to have a seat. “Well, thank you for meeting with me, I am looking forward to hearing more about this opportunity”, I said in my best interview voice.

At this point she launched into, what was obviously, a rehearsed monologue. “The Saint Andrews Society runs the largest homeless shelter in the state” she began. “Over the past few years we have seen a significant influx of people with mental illness coming to our door seeking services. The state has been deinstitutionalizing mentally ill people, but without any sort of safety net”, she explained. “Unfortunately, they decompensate, stop taking their medications and end up here” as she gestured to the building around the room. I wasn’t sure what she meant by “decompensate”, but I was familiar with the problem of the homeless mentally ill, having read about it in my psychology textbooks. She continued, “recently we were awarded a grant of more than 1 million dollars to develop supervised apartment programs for people who are getting services from the Department of Mental Health”. “Instead of being discharged to the street, they will be referred to our program”.

“How many people will the program support?”, I asked, rather intelligently I thought. Mary replied, “The program hasn’t even started yet, there is still much to do. We will get two clients a month for the first few months until things are really up and running”. We are working closely with the Department of Mental Health, they have already identified the first few people to be referred to our program directly from the psychiatric hospital. That’s the reason we are so interested in getting all the staff on-board. When we are fully up to speed we expect to support 30 people”.

“How will this be structured”, I asked, now interested. “I mean, where will the program be located and what is that we, er, or I will be doing exactly”?

She pointed out the window. “We have the property being readied even as we speak, you can just make it out up there on top of the hill”.

Through the dirt stained windows, I thought I could spy the roof of the building she was pointing to out of several hundred I could see. “They are setting up the apartments now, putting up new doors, alarms and fences”, she explained. “Your job”, she said fixing me with narrowed eyes, “will be to help them with their daily living skills, such as cooking and shopping. Of course, we will have to ensure that they take their medication, but we will also be helping them to get jobs, keep doctors appointments for continuing treatment and running psycho-educational groups”.

As she spoke I could imagine a professional building with white- washed walls and offices, with smiling crazy people coming in and out, happy to be in such a place, rather than the hospital. I had never worked with “the mentally ill” before, excluding some of my co-workers at other jobs I have had who I swore were nuts. I was torn because I was also vying for a job at a local hospital working with people who had traumatic brain injury. I was really more interested in this other job – as it was closer to what I was interested in doing, neurology, - but they had not yet called me back for a second job interview.

It seemed like it was my turn to talk. “Well”, I said, “it sounds just like what I have been doing”. I have been working with people with mental retardation for the past several years, doing all of the same sorts of things you have mentioned”. I prattled on about my experience for a few minutes and it was her time to be appearing interested. I did believe that I was qualified because

it was a lot like what I had been doing. She seemed especially interested in the fact that I studied the martial arts.

After a few rudimentary interview questions, such as the obligatory “where do you see yourself in five years”, Mary suddenly sprang from her seat. “There are some people I want you to meet”, she said.

I was taken off guard, but took this for a good sign; thinking that it meant I was being seriously considered. Mary asked me to follow her and we walked a few paces down the hall. Soon we were in a small conference room empty save a table and a few chairs. She had me take a seat while she left the room again. I sat there for what seemed an uncomfortable period of time while I studied the architecture of the bare-walled room.

Mary finally returned with the aforementioned people in tow. Three people in addition to Mary filed into the room and took seats facing me. I realized it was going to be a panel interview! No interview format is as anxiety provoking or nerve rattling as the panel interview. I swallowed hard and attempted to re-gain my composure.

One by one I was introduced. I made a mental note to try and remember the names, but was sure that I would forget them. There was Joe, a tall thin man of about 30 with short red hair, spectacles and a white cardigan, looking for all the world like a divinity student. Mary explained that Joe ran the thrift store and the soup kitchen. The next person to whom I was introduced was Paul, a short, balding, stocky man who looked a little like Danny Devito. Paul was the Executive Director of the organization. Paul appraised me with beady and sparkling eyes. Lastly there was Father Casta. Of course, he was dressed in his black priest suit complete with the rabbis, or white collar. He looked only a little more than 30 himself, though I thought he was probably older. Between his teeth he clenched a cigar that had gone out and as he held it there it forced him to smile in such a way that I was reminded of the Joker from Bat-man fame. Pleasantries were exchanged all around.

They took turns asking me the requisite interview questions and asked me about my experience. It was for the most part an exact repeat of the process I had gone through with Mary, but with more people. I explained to them about the degree in psychology I was working on and about working with adults who have mental retardation. Again, they seemed quite interested in my martial arts training, to a degree that made me uneasy.

Before I knew it they were thanking me for coming. I stood up and shook each persons hand in-turn. Mary remained as the others left and slowly we walked down the hallway back towards her office. Outside her open door, she explained that they still had a few applicants to interview ( of course ), but that they were very interested in me. Inside, I felt my temperature rise at hearing this news. Alright!

She told me that she wanted to check my references, and I told her that it was fine to do so. She shook my hand and told me that she would be back in touch with me in a few days. I thought she was going to at least walk me to the door, but she turned and entered her office. She spun into her

chair, just below the giant wooden crucifix over her desk and busied herself with paperwork. At that moment, I was struck by the notion that she was probably an ex-nun. I wondered about the type of person who would be an *ex-nun*, and started for the stairs. I realized that my fear had come true; I was walking around in the dark of this place with no guide and no clear recollection of how I had gotten in. I managed to find my way outside anyway, I never did see the smoking lady again, and I stumbled out into the snow. I breathed the air deeply to rid myself of the suffocating feeling I had gotten walking around in the shelter. I turned and proceeded to drive home into the miasma of the storm that swirled around me.

## **CHAPTER 2       FAIRVIEW**

Mary was true to her word. After about two days she called me and offered me the job. She had hired three other people in addition to me. One person, Shirley, had a masters degree in social work and would work first shift Monday through Friday. She was to be our team leader as the most educated/experienced person. Another woman, Lorraine, would work second shift through the week. The third person, Jim, was scheduled for third shift Monday through Friday. What was left had to be one of the shittiest schedules known to man. I would be working full time, but strictly a weekend shift. My schedule would be from Friday at 3pm straight through until Sunday at 3pm every weekend. It seemed that there was an apartment on site in which Jim would live during the week, and I would occupy on the weekends. I would get to sleep, but be available if any of the clients needed me. Not wanting to appear too eager, I told Mary that I would think about it and get back to her the next day.

After I hung up the phone, I punched my fist into the air. Alright, I got the job! I was elated, but also anxious in a way that only a new job can make you. What kinda crappy schedule was this anyway? Not for the first time did I begin to suspect that things were not going to work out the way I had imagined. I was torn; happy to have new opportunities, but not certain if this is the one I want.

I debated it for all of about 5 minutes. I had no other prospects and the economy was not great. I was making 4 dollars an hour where I was working and this was over a dollar an hour raise. I rationalized that I was getting in on the ground floor of a brand new venture and would learn a great deal. If things did not work out I could always quit and be right back where I was. Anyway, the funky schedule allowed me to go to school *and* still work at my current job. I must have been crazy, but the next day I called Mary back and said yes.

I started work about a week later. Mary had given me directions to the facility where I was to be working. As I pulled up the street near where the building was supposed to be I kept thinking that this was a strange place for a mental health facility. It was a residential type neighborhood comprised of run down apartment buildings. All in all there were approximately 15 buildings each with 5 apartments in them. Some apartments were flats and others were townhouse style. All of the buildings had dirt parking lots in front, many with broken down cars parked there. Later I learned that the apartments had been built at the end of WW II to accommodate soldiers returning from the war. It looked like it too.

I was still driving up the road when I spotted a big blue van. It appeared to be out of place so I inspected more closely, slowing down to take a look. Standing out of the late February wind on the other side of the vehicle were 4 people, and Mary was clearly one of them. She again wore a bright floral dress, standing out against the bleak winter surroundings. I pulled over and parked next to the van. I wondered what Mary was doing here, but figured I would find out sooner or later. First there were introductions to take place.

With Mary, was a younger man in his early 20's who looked like an all-American type – the kid next door type who played high school ball well, but then grew up. I figured that this had to be Jim and was correct. In addition to Jim there were two older women. Lorraine was medium height with gray hair and appeared to be in her 50's. She reminded me of someone's hip grandmother, and I liked her right away, she had a friendly and outgoing quality. On the other hand there was Shirley. She was short with her brown hair pulled back into a bun. She wore glasses on the end of her nose with one of those chain things that you wear around your neck to stop them from falling off. She was very soft spoken with clammy hands and when she spoke she had a tendency to look down her nose at you. I took an instant dislike to her. She reminded me of a crotchety old librarian.

Mary informed us that she was going to show us around the area where the program would be and announced that the apartment unit we were standing in front of was going to be the main office. I was agog. I did not know what to think. Were they going to revamp this entire building? Were they behind in schedule? Was the facility located somewhere else? It clearly was not what I expected.

Mary said that they had just gotten the van the day before and she beamed proudly at it. She pulled out the keys and told us to hop in. We proceeded to drive around the apartment complex while Mary point out where apartments were to be. I sat in back with Shirley in the front and Lorraine and Jim in the middle. Occasionally, someone would ask a question. The van was diesel so it made a loud chugging noise. I couldn't hear so I sat in mute silence with my own thoughts. Not only was I nervous, this being my first day on the job and all, but I also did not know what to make of the situation. It was clear now that everything I thought was wrong. There was no "facility". Mary described how there would be two clients per apartment. We were going to start off getting two at a time each month. We would continue in this way until we had the full compliment of 30 clients. Their apartments were to be spread out all over the neighborhood, so as to better blend in. Mary explained that they did not want to the neighbors to think of our clients as the "crazies on the hill".

We stopped at one unit just a few buildings away from the main office. Mary stated that this would be the first unit to set up. Today, part of our job was to go to the furniture store and select the furniture for the apartments. Mary stopped the van and we went in. Inside, the apartments weren't too bad. They had obviously been fixed up recently with new linoleum and appliances. In the living room there was a new rug on the floor. Aside from these observations it was a typical

apartment; two bedrooms and a bathroom on the second floor and a living room, kitchen/dining room combination on the first. They faced the street in the front and bordered on woods in the back.

In the living room was a bunch of folding chairs. Mary pulled one up and sat down. Evidently we were going to have some kind of a meeting. Mary began by explaining that they first two clients were not due for several weeks. In the meantime we would occupy ourselves with fixing up the apartments and setting up operations. When we were not doing this sort of work, we were going to orient as staff at the state mental hospital where the clients would be coming from. In this way we could get to know them before they were released. Suddenly, I got a chill down my spine.

I felt that I was in freefall and did not know what I had gotten myself into. I did not imagine myself working here long. I was very uncomfortable with the way things were going. It was like thinking you were getting a new car, only to find out that it was a run down piece of crap. Everything seemed so makeshift, not the professional organization I had hoped would boost my career.

We went back outside and into the van. Again Mary drove. She pointed out other apartments that were “ours”, but I wasn’t listening. In the front Mary and Shirley were chatting away about something, but again I was in my own world. The road bent around in a circle and soon we were out on the main road and heading downtown. I didn’t know where we were going.

Once downtown Mary pulled over in front of what was obviously a school. She turned around and asked me a question, snapping me out of my reverie. She wanted me to go inside and find Father Casta to let him know what we were doing today. Mary explained that Father Casta was a counselor at the school. I felt like I was put on the spot. My mind raced. What *were* we doing today? How would I find Father Casta? My head spun. I still had not gotten over the shock and disorientation of things not being as I expected. Often things do not work out as expected, but this was to the extreme.

Part of my problem was that I was a wolf in sheep’s clothing. I felt out of my element. Here I was pretending to be a professional person when I was just a 23-year-old kid. I had never had a real job in my life. I was not religious at all and here I was working for an ostensibly catholic organization. What the hell, I thought. What’s the worse that could happen? I got up, and stooping, got out of the van. I felt everyone’s eyes upon me as I walked into the school.

Once inside I felt like such an idiot. The school was huge! How was I going to find this guy? I didn’t know where to begin and there was no one readily available to ask. I wandered the halls looking at rows of lockers and closed doors. As I came to an intersection I saw a sign that said “guidance”. That’s what I needed right then and since at that point any direction was as good as another, I followed the sign.

Walking down the hall, I came to the guidance office, outside the door where several names on a wooden plaque. Luckily for me one of them was Father Casta’s. My heart leapt for joy! Thank

god, I was afraid of wondering around like an idiot. I was glad to have found his office by accident. I went in and found Father sitting behind a desk. He was chewing on a cigar that had gone out probably sometime ago and he was wearing his priestly get up. I thought it an odd thing that a priest would be sucking on a burned out cigar. Right there my mind went blank I forgot his name. I forgot my name. He stared looking at me incomprehensibly waiting for me to speak.

I was so flustered that I blurted out my name, and then realized he probably did not know who I was. I quickly explained that I worked for the Saint Anthony Society and that Mary had sent me. As soon as I had said this, I realized that I had gotten the name of the organization wrong! It was the Saint Andrews Society. I felt like such an idiot. I suddenly had tunnel vision and my hands became sweaty, Father Casta continued just to look at me and did not say word, but his mouth hung open a bit with the cigar pointing to the floor.

I paused to regain some composure. I carried on hoping that he did not catch the full implication of my faux pas. I had somewhat rehearsed what I was going to say and went with it. "Mary sent me in here to tell you that she has the van and that we are all going shopping for furniture", I said. "Oh", he replied. "Did all the staff show up"? he asked. "Yes, I said, we are all together and Mary has just finished showing us around and explaining how things are going to work". "Splendid" he said, "keep up the good work".

With that I felt as if I had been dismissed, and I was just as happy to leave. I turned on my heel and almost ran back the way I came. There is something about priests that make me nervous, like I am accidentally going to sin in front of them or something. When I got outside the van was still where it had been parked and I could see everyone inside carrying on a lively conversation. I really felt that I was just not going to fit in with these people.

I climbed back aboard the van and took my seat in the rear. I felt a little like the kid who sits at the child's table for Thanksgiving. Mary started up the van again and we were off, we drove for about 20 minutes, until we came to a small furniture store, Pilgrims Wayside. Why do so many furniture stores have Wayside as part of their name? We parked and went in.

Inside, we were the only customers. Mary spoke to the solitary salesman, while everyone else pretended to be interested and involved. I walked around and checked out some of what they had for sale. I was surprised again. I had expected strong industrial type furniture, like that you might find in a hotel room, but it Mary was looking at some fairly expensive stuff. It was a lot nicer than my own furniture, especially considering that much of my furniture consisted of hand-me downs and the occasional cardboard box. Much of what had been set aside for Mary, as she had done some shopping already, was whicker and ornate.

After making arrangements to have the furniture delivered it was back into the van with Mary behind the wheel. Again, we all sat in the same seats we had before. This time we were out on the open highway. Mary turned in her seat and shouted over her shoulder in such a way as to make certain that even I could hear and explained that we were all going to go the Fairview Hospital.



Wow, I was pretty excited about this, I had not imagined that we would be going there so soon, but there were many things about all of this I had not imagined. Of all the aspects of the job, this was the most interesting to me, and what I had most looked forward to. For centuries hospitals have been “the” center of psychological study. Pictures of large darkened buildings with shuttered windows behind which they did frontal lobotomies on unsuspecting crazy people came unbidden to my mind. At one time state hospitals like Fairview had housed thousands of people, but many of them were now closed and those that were still open were on the way out in favor of more enlightened “community based” courses of psychological treatment, like those we were in the process of setting up.

The hospital was quite a ways down the road and I again I found myself silenced by a cocoon of diesel engine noise. Jim sat right in front of me and pretended to be listening, though I was sure he could not hear much more than me.

Finally we were pulling off the highway. A small sign pointed left to the hospital. As we drove on a still larger and more ornate sign told us we were still going the right direction. Shortly after that were two stone pillars one on either side of the road, probably the signposts of a past era. Mary turned in her seat again and shouted to us that the hospital had been in operation for more than a hundred years. She explained that they used to have thousands of patients there, but now had less than a thousand. It still sounded like a lot of people to me. As she was telling us this, I saw out the window to my left that we were passing a small cemetery. It looked unused and was surrounded by a rusty wrought iron fence. Within there were a number of small headstones, tightly packed. I had the sensation that I was on some grizzly tourist ride. Seeing these stones, I was suddenly keenly aware of the full story of the human condition that this hospital had contained for more than a century. What might it have been like to live your life out in a psychiatric hospital at the turn of the century?

The road curved up and around a large field. Here and there were planted a few large trees. I wondered if the winding road and the open fields were designed so as to make it more difficult for people to escape. The road angled up and finally we were treated with our first view of Fairview. My first thought was that it looked a lot like a college campus, much like the college I was going to. Set back from the road were a number of well kept and stately looking buildings. The road we were on straightened out into a wide boulevard. Despite the cold on the other side of the glass, the bright sun, lack of snow and blue sky made the scene appear as if it were a nice summer day. I could imagine family having picnics on that giant lawn. It could accommodate hundreds of families.

We drove past several stop signs and a number of buildings. The campus was much bigger than I expected. Mary drove slowly reading the names on the buildings. The road we were on took us around back of the largest and most ornate building there. Clearly this was some sort of administration building. We hopped out of the van, with me backing out and feeling somewhat uncomfortable having my butt stick out into the air as I stepped off the van. Once we were off the van and assembled in a small circle around her Mary said “we have to go inside and get you all

signed in, you are going to need to register so that you can work here over the course of the next few weeks. That is when we are not working back at our site”. We followed Mary through a heavy metal door and up a set of well-worn marbled steps. Mary had evidently been here before perhaps a few times as she seemed to know where she was going, taking a number of various turns.

She led us to a small office. The room was cut in half by a large wooden partition. Again, I was struck by the similarity between this place and a college campus. Behind the desk sat a woman who was so short I could only see the top of her head while she was sitting. Mary spoke with her, but since I was standing in the back I could not hear what was said.

The woman returned with a sheaf of papers for us to complete. She handed them to us wordlessly one by one. With no further conversation we followed Mary back outside.

Then it was back on the van for a short ride past strangely quiet buildings, as we pulled up towards one in particular at the back of the campus; the “back ward”. We all piled out and walked up to the obvious front door.

At the door we had to page someone inside using an intercom. Shortly someone came along and unlocking the door, spoke with Mary. We were expected and Mary knew this person. They escorted us in, but we were not immediately introduced. I brought up the rear as the hospital employee led us up several flights of stairs. I was impressed with the size of the building. The stairs were made of white marble and the stairwells were enclosed in metal cages, evidently to prevent someone from jumping over the railing and falling to the death. We walked up several flights. I am sure that at sometime 100’s of people had called this one building home.

Finally we reached the top of the stairs and we walked down a short hall. Off to one side there was a bench, and sitting on the bench an elderly woman. She was withered and gray like someone you would see in a National Geographic magazine. She pulled an overcoat tightly around her shoulders as the smoke from her pipe billowed in the slow moving air. She laughed a toothless grin as we walked past.

Presently, we came to a metal door with a small square protective glass window, you know, like the ones that have the black lines in them. The hospital ward pulled out a large ring of keys and begins to undo the locked door. Through the window in the door several faces peered back at us, heads jockeying for position. As the door swung open we were immediately beset by a group of 4 or 5 “clients”. They moved around us like moths attracted to a flame.

We entered a large hall with high ceilings and windows sporting black bars. To my left a semi-circular desk, the “nurses station”. Along both walls were a number of padded green benches. A TV sat in a box on the wall with chicken wire barring its front. Approximately 15 people sat or otherwise milled about. We walked up towards the nursing station and congregated around the hospital employee who had brought us in. We stood in a ragged semi-circle as Mary introduced her as “Belinda”; she was a social worker on the ward. She was very pretty black woman who

could have been a model. She spoke softly but articulately. Belinda introduced herself and made us welcome.

She explained that she was our Mental Health Liaison and would be helping us in terms of transitioning our clients into the community. She repeated some of the things already explained by Mary in the earlier meeting. When she was finished she said that she would be showing us around the hospital and introducing us to “Tony” and “Charlie”, the two men who would be our first clients.

She led us down the “day room” and towards the “dorms”, more marble lining the floor, worn smooth with years of walking. On the right, a bathroom room, on the left, a water fountain. Later on a closet of some kind and another bathroom. At the end of the hallway the room “T-eeed” to the left and the right, men’s here and the women’s there. Large double doors admitted us into the dorms. On both side of the room approximately 10 beds lined each wall. Each bed had its own nightstand and petition. On the nightstands incidentals such as shaving crème and photos. Each bed sporting a metal frame and a thin mattress. So far this whole placed looked like a cliché; exactly as you might expect for a “mental hospital”. I was exhilarated though, full of thoughts like, “what if I get locked in here”?, Are theses people dangerous? They certainly did not appear to be. For the most part they were content to observe us from a distance; one person wandering off to be replaced by someone else. Though were always followed by someone curious about us.

We finished the tour and went back to the nurses station. Belinda said “wait right here, I will go get Tony and Charlie”. We stood about for several minutes observing the architecture of the place and watching the clients out of the corner of our eyes.

Belinda returned with a young white man and an older black man. We were introduced in turn. Tony the younger man was short and thin with a straggly beard and thick glasses. He said hello and nodded to each of us, his face showing only a slight smile. Charlie was perhaps in his 50’s. A hunched old Negro with puffy eyes, a bit of a stoop and a shuffling gate that told you he had seen years of a hard life. He croaked “Hello”, through teeth yellow with nicotine.

Belinda said to the assembled group “Tony and Charlie will be moving into their new apartment in about two weeks. In the meantime, you will be setting up the apartments, working at the hospital training on the ward and working with Tony and Charlie in the community to help them get jobs and other supports”. Our first clients! Real people! Charlie smiled and seemed slightly eager. Tony reserved, but polite.

We said our goodbyes, and Mary escorted us to the front door. Belinda followed. Unlocking the door we went back into the hall. Belinda unlocked doors along the way. Here and there we would pass people walking in the hallway like kids in the hallway of a school. We went outside the front door and said our farewells to Belinda. We jumped back in the van and headed home.

### CHAPTER 3 TONY AND CHARLIE

For the next two weeks I went to work and did a myriad of things, from cleaning apartments to moving furniture and going regularly back and forth to the hospital. We became a part of the staff at the hospital, working at the desk and just talking to the people there. It was almost like we were paid to be these people's friends. We gave them cigarettes out of locked boxes and went with them to activities like art class. We sat and watched TV. That was the extent of the training we received, except we did get trained in CPR and I watched a video tape on how to restrain people.

The life of the people in the hospital revolves around cigarettes, it is their candy and their currency. Many rolled their own cigarettes because it was cheaper. Every activity involved time in between in which smoking occurred. Control over cigarettes was a major issue. One day, a client got mad because he could not get another smoke until a 20-minute period elapsed. He began to get upset and scream. Suddenly he ran and hit his head against the wall and began slapping himself hard in the face. Staff came running and wrestled him to the floor. One man pulled down his pants while another gave him a shot of Haldol in the rear. Haldol is a tranquilizer and anti-psychotic medication similar to Thorazine, a more well known pharmaceutical. Two of the men pulled him up off the floor and escorted him from the day hall. The staff walked off huffing and puffing while the other people in the ward watched in silence.

One day I took Charlie to the commissary to buy clothes. Most of the people who lived at the hospital had very little. He needed to get more clothes before he was discharged. We were given a pass so I was as able to escort him out of the building and on to the grounds. At the hospital they have a small store. People who work at the hospital earned tokens they could exchange at the commissary for merchandise like clothes. Charlie worked in the green house.

The commissary was several buildings down. It was a cold day in mid-spring so we walked briskly without talking. Charlie wasn't much of a conversationalist anyway. The store was located on the first floor of a building that was otherwise unoccupied. In the store they had candy and racks of clothes. Jeans of various types flopped out of bins aligned against one wall.

While Charlie tried on pairs of pants, I struck up a conversation with the woman behind the counter. She was ancient and looked like she was here when they built the place. She did not have any sort of name tag on, so I wasn't sure if she was a staff person or a "patient". That could be a common problem at the hospital. You couldn't tell who was who without a program, until they started to speak, that is. Psychiatric patients had a slow methodical way of talking.

"So, where do you get all these clothes"? I asked trying to break the ice and kill time. I wondered if the state paid for them. I checked the labels on some of the pants and they were expensive designer names. She looked up at me from her newspaper with rheumy eyes. I was betting on "patient". She said "from the Salvation Army mostly". When you donate your clothes in their bins, this is where they end up, that is, if they do not go to the Soviet Union or some third world country".

“I see”, I said. The woman went back to her paper as if to dismiss me, and since I was out of burning questions, the witty repartee was over. I poked around pretending to check out the clothes. A short time later, Charlie came out with two new pairs of pants. When it came time to pay, Charlie pulled out his wallet and handed the woman a piece of paper. It stated the total number of credits he had available to spend. The woman took his piece of paper, deducted the correct number of credits and handed it back to him. Neither party spoke during the transaction.

Outside, Charlie lit up a smoke and threw the bag of clothes over his shoulder. He looked for all the world like some elderly merchant marine. When we got back to the ward, Charlie had to do his laundry. He took a few articles of clothing and walked out into the main hallway. Set into the wall of the hallway was a small metal door. Charlie opened it and threw his clothes in. The door seemed to work very much like a door on a mailbox. Charlie opened it again to make certain the clothes had gone. I asked him how he was going to get his clothes back. He said that he wouldn't. He would just go get new ones, he would not see those clothes again.

There was supposed to be a structure to the day at the hospital. There were classes, such as cooking or arts and crafts, but mostly there were short intervals of each class punctuated by long intervals of smoking. People walked in and out freely, and pretty much did whatever they wanted to do. The patients shuffled around the day room occupying themselves with whatever delusion or hallucination they might happen to be having at that moment.

After my experience with the “laundry”, I paid more attention to people's clothes. No one wore clothes that fit; they were all too big or too small. No one was allowed to have a belt for fear that they might try to kill themselves with it, so people were constantly walking around pulling up their trousers. Some enterprising young people learned how to fashion a belt using socks. Why the doctors weren't concerned that people could just as easily hang themselves with the socks, I will never know.

As I was an extra person on the ward, I had no real assigned duties. No one told me what to do so most of the time I followed Charlie around. I am sure he thought I was a big pain in the ass, but he never complained.

When I wasn't at the hospital, I was at the apartments, moving furniture. I dressed up to go to work each day, though I don't know why, most of the time I would end up getting dirty and sweaty. I thought to myself, I wasn't going to school to get a degree in psychology so that I could move dressers around, but that's what I did.

There was also a lot of shopping to be done. Mary wanted to have each apartment outfitted with blankets and such in preparation for Tony and Charlie's moving in. Often I would go with Mary to the local department store and fill up carriages with sheets, and soap, towels and games. Typically Mary would have two carts and so would I. I wondered what she was doing with all this stuff, because it seemed like a lot for two people, but she explained that she was storing it in preparation for the rest of the people who would be coming. All in all we were going to have 30

clients when the program was full.

Since we had no clients yet, no one was working their normal schedule. I was primarily working days, which seemed to agree with me. Spring had arrived and it was nice to go home at the end of the day and it was still light out. I did not see my coworkers much, and I wondered what they were doing. Occasionally, we would have some sort of training, such as first aid. It turns out that Mary was not an ex-nun, but an RN nurse and so she trained us in basic first aid and CPR.

Finally the big day came. Tony and Charlie came up to Watertown from the Hospital with several staff from the hospital. They all got a tour of the complex and the office we had set up. In addition to the office, just a little ways down the street we also had set up what was called “the community room. It was going to be the staff’s office while on duty, a place where the clients could socialize and a place where we would hold meetings and such. All the big wigs seemed pretty impressed with the work that had been done, however they often spoke in the first person, saying WE, as if they had anything to do with it.

After the tour and hearty handshakes all around, everyone left leaving me with Tony and Charlie and a pile of things on the sidewalk. I helped them carry things in and set up the furniture the way they wanted it. After this was done, I did not know what to do with myself. Tony and Charlie wanted to relax and smoke, and there wasn’t anything else to do so I sat around watching them and just sitting in the kitchen reading a magazine. I felt like a real 5<sup>th</sup> wheel, and wondered what Tony and Charlie thought of my just hanging around, but they were used to a different situation entirely.

Now that we had our first clients, my schedule was going to change to what it was supposed to be, weekends only. Tony and Charlie moved in on a Friday, and I had the weekend off since we were in a state of transition. Mary had scheduled a staff meeting for Monday, and so when 5pm rolled around, I was out of there like a shot.

When I got to work Monday morning for the staff meeting, I could tell by the look on everyone’s faces that something was up. Lorriane took my aside and confided to me that Charlie had gone out over the weekend, bought booze and got a little schnockered. Lorraine had been on shift at the time and evidently had not known this had happened until Charlie was three sheets to the wind. Mary was aware of it and was not happy.

When we congregated in the bedroom-cum-office that was Mary’s office, Mary began the discussion with this topic. She started out reasonably calm, but became more and more upset. Lorraine had tried to defend herself, by pointing out that the guys were not locked up and that we could not sit and watch them 24 hours a day. At some point Mary had had enough. Her face was getting redder and redder. Finally she blew up, and throwing her books on the floor pointed at Lorraine. “You are the one who messed this up”! “This is all your fault! Don’t you talk back at me!”

I had never seen such an outburst from such a professional person before and did not know what to do or say, so I just sat there. Jim and Shirley looked around the room pretending they were not there.

Lorraine stood up and with tears in her eyes said “I am an adult, and no one speaks to me that way. I quit”. Then Lorraine turned on her heel and walked out of the room. I never saw her again.

Things were not off to an auspicious start, so when my first weekend rolled around, I left my house with a large sense of forbidding. I packed a bag and kissed my then girlfriend goodbye as if I was going off to prison.

Things went well that first weekend, I don’t remember having any problems. I do recall that I did not have much to do. I took the clients shopping, but mostly we just sat around. I did not want to repeat the same problem that Lorraine had, so I made sure I kept an eye on the guys. I helped them cook dinner and made sure they took their medications.

A few times throughout the night I stopped down to check on them. Their apartment was quiet and all the lights were out.

Back at my apartment, I found Jim to be an accommodating roommate. He had put up some provisions, and was in the process of making the place homelike, even though it was temporary living quarters for us both. He even had beer, and offered me one as things were settling down for the night. We sat around and chatted about the job and our experience so far. It had the feel of a dorm room at a seminary.

Thus, it went on this way for the first few weeks. There was no more drinking on Charlie’s part as far as anyone could tell, and things were proceeding smoothly. Though we still had the office and the apartments to set up, there often wasn’t much to do. Both Charlie and Tony had gotten jobs, so occasionally we had to drive them to or from work. For the most part though, my job consisted of sitting at their kitchen table when I wasn’t cleaning apartments or moving more furniture.

One Saturday morning, I arose early and walked down the street to the office. I had to pass Tony and Charlie’s apartment and as I neared their place, I noticed that something was wrong. As I got closer, I realized that there was a bunch of furniture scattered across the lawn in front of their apartment. I couldn’t believe my eyes and had no idea what was going on. I walked up to have a closer look and noticed that it was the furniture from Tony and Charlie’s living room, and it was situated around the lawn exactly as it had been placed in the living room.

I knocked on the door and Charlie answered. Charlie was an early riser and would often get up to smoke, while Tony being much younger preferred to sleep in. Charlie came to the door in his bathrobe. I did not know where to begin asking questions, I asked Charlie why his furniture was on the lawn and he said he didn’t know. He looked at it as if realizing for the first time it was there. I knew that Charlie was a wily old man who had a lot more going on in his brain than he let on. I asked him if he knew what had happened and he said, no. I then asked him where Tony

was, and he gestured upstairs with a nod of his head.

I went upstairs and knocked on Tony's closed door. At first there was silence, but then I heard the sound of the bed creaking. Tony opened the door in his boxer shorts. Without preamble I said, "Tony do you know why your living room furniture is on the front lawn"? He looked at me for a moment and said, no. He acted as if this sort of thing happened every day. After a pregnant pause, he looked thoughtful and asked "the furniture is on the lawn"? with a brief smile and slightly more animation. I said, "yes, any idea how it got there?". He said, wait a second, and closed the door. I could hear the sound of dressers being opened and what sounded like clothes being put on. I went back down stairs and sat with Charlie at the kitchen table. Charlie didn't say a word, he sat there quietly smoking and looking out the window. He seemed content to do this forever.

Tony came downstairs and we all went outside on in the yard to look at the furniture. Tony ventured "perhaps we were robbed"? I said, "well, I doubt that because nothing is missing", but lets go back inside and take a look". Sure enough nothing was amiss. Even the TV was sitting there unharmed.

I helped them put the furniture back into the apartment and then continued down the street to the office to call my boss. She was incredulous, but took the information in stride. What more could you do?

I strongly suspected that it was Tony who had moved the furniture. He appeared to be the "sicker" of the two. Charlie to me seemed like a tired old drunk, but you could tell Tony had deeper issues. I often saw Tony talking to himself, sometimes just mumbling his lips quietly when others were around, as if he was repeating everything you were saying. One night as I made my final rounds to check on them, I remember seeing Tony in the kitchen talking animatedly to himself and gesturing largely. I made a mental note to watch Tony more closely for signs that his illness might not be so contained.

The days went by without any further strange occurrences. Things started to get busier as we prepared for the arrival of two more clients. We also had to find someone to replace Lorraine and for now, Mary was working days and Shirley was working Lorraine's second shift. We were also still going to the hospital to work with the discharge team for the two new folks as well as giving the staff there updates on Tony and Charlie. It was good to be picking up the pace, because I was getting tired of just sitting and watching the guys, and I am sure they were tired of it too, even though they never complained.

The next two guys to join us were more of a match. They were of similar ages and backgrounds. John was outgoing, prone to sudden bursts of laughter for no reason and very talkative. Bill on the other hand was quiet, introspective and seemed to be acutely anxious at all times. They occupied an apartment at the opposite end of the development from Charlie and Tony.



Their transition was smoother than the one experienced by Charlie and Tony, mostly because it occurred without so much fanfare and no visiting dignitaries from the hospital. I helped them in and then gave them some space to settle in.

I stopped in a few times during the course of the night. Now that we had more people in the program, and since they were so far apart, I had taken to driving around the neighborhood in the van, versus walking. At 8pm I went up to bring them their medication. Mary had decided that staff would hold to the medications and bring them to the clients, until we had a better sense as to how they were going to do in the community. What we were doing was ostensibly “supervised self administration”, because it is illegal for a non-licensed person with no training to pass medications, but it is thin, technical line, I am sure.

When I brought up the meds. I sat with John for awhile at the kitchen table. John could go on and on. He was an affable guy, but a lot of the time he did not make a lot of sense. John had active hallucinations and delusions, and he often seemed to enjoy them. Despite his talkativeness, I could tell that he was a little nervous. As I was getting ready to leave the wind picked up. John said “did you hear that”? “Yes”, I said. He said, “there are witches flying around here”.

The days went on. Everyone seemed to be transitioning well. Everyone had gotten jobs, and Tony was keen about getting a car. In the meantime, the developer who was rehabbing the units was moving ahead and more and more units were being rented/leased or sold. The developer was a young guy who had started out with buying and fixing up one home as a teenager and now reportedly was a millionaire. He seemed like a down to earth guy who drove an old jeep. His “secretary” was another matter. She was young, blonde and beautiful. She was often coming around to see him at whatever unit he was fixing up. She was easy to identify in the neighborhood because she drove a brand new bright red Porsche. I am sure he was banging her. If he wasn’t he should have been. I ran into both of them quite a bit and they both seemed like real nice people.

Mary had hired a new employee, finally, to take Lorraine’s place. She had been onboard for awhile before I got to meet her. One Friday afternoon I did. Her name was Rhonda and she looked like a giant mouse. She was short and petite with short black hair and thick glasses. She had deep sunken eyes that made her look like she had some terminal disease. She was quiet as people who lack self confidence are, and I could tell right away that the clients would eat her alive. In many ways she seemed to be a young Shirley and in fact Shirley had taken her “under her wing”. This was fine by me, because I liked the fact that I was pretty much on my own all weekend. Yes, Mary would stop by quite a bit, usually Saturday morning, I would see her light blue Carmen Gia parked outside her office, but she usually left me alone.

Jim had taken up a role as the program handy man and he and Mary spent a lot of time together, fixing up the next few units people would be moving into. I think Mary fancied Jim, and I wondered if they had anything going on together. Whenever she was around him she would laugh a lot and bat her eyelashes at him. On the weekends when she dressed down, that’s when they

spent the most time together, she tended to dress a little too young for her age.

Soon we had 2 more clients. Since things were going smoothly the big shots at the hospital were pressuring us to step up the time frame between intakes. With Jim working with Mary a lot now, my job, in terms of the new places, meant mostly cleaning and hanging blinds. I must have hung 100 sets of blinds! It was also my job to get all the furnishings in the apartments. If Jim was the Handy-man, I was the furniture mover. Sometimes, I would get Tony to help me. He was the only one who would, the others being too old or weak, but Tony spent a lot of time at his parents on the weekend, which meant I did it a lot myself.

When I took the clients shopping, I would stock up on things like can openers and the like. We also got a lot of this sort of thing from the Thrift store, and my office, The “Community Room” was piled high with pots and pans, dishes and other tag sale hand offs.

If I was too slow getting apartments ready, Mary would come and breath down my neck, and while I had not seen a repeat performance of the way she had been with Lorraine, I wasn’t taking any chances. This meant I had to find innovative ways to get furniture into apartments by myself.

Beds, nightstands and even kitchen tables weren’t too bad, but the 6 drawer dressers, to handle them by yourself, were kind of tough. I found that if I rolled them end over end, I could even do this alone.

I got a good workout this way, but I still began to put on weight, mostly because I ate junk food all weekend long. Since I was working, I did not feel much like cooking, so my diet consisted of a lot of frozen and instant foods.

I tried, when I could, to be something other than a furniture mover. I was eager to use my burgeoning psychological knowledge in some productive way. I researched group activities on topics like relaxation therapy and we held informal “group meetings”, but the were not required and very few people ever came.

One of our new clients, Ray was going to be a handful. He was a Vietnam vet, or so he said, he got a pension of something like \$1,200/month, which he constantly reminded you of. He felt that he was “disabled” and therefore shouldn’t have to work. However, working was a premise of the program, and Ray just wasn’t getting with the program. He just wanted to sit around, smoke and drink coffee. All of these guys smoked and drank coffee like fiends. Most of them had hands that were stained yellow from so much smoking. Its all they lived for. Ray did talk about buying boats and things like that, but it was an effort for him to get up and change the TV channel.

Ray was a big guy, and fairly quick with a good sense of humor. He was lazy as could be, and wanted me to do all his shopping and cooking. I wasn’t sure what Shirley and Rhonda did during the week, but it seemed that helping these guys with shopping, cooking and laundry was my job in addition to my furniture moving and blind hanging exploits.

Ray's roommate was Dan. Dan was in his 60's, short and slim with wiry gray hair. He did not say too much, but would punctuate Ray's statements with "rights". It was as if speaking was too tiring for him. Unlike Ray, Dan was eager to get to work and try to get out of this program, which he seemed to view as some sort of probation. He was your stereotypical homeless guy. Despite their foibles all of our now 6 guys were doing well. But things were about to change.

One Friday, I came to work and found that the apartment unit next to the community room was occupied by a new client. His name was Bill. He was just a few years older than me with long black hair, a beer gut, and a thick bushy beard that made him look like some sort of hobo. What was strange was that he was, for now at least, living alone. To date, all of our people came in pairs. I went to see Mary, who explained that he was some sort of emergency placement, and that he moved in today. My experience so far was that almost everyone moved in on Friday, the day that I started work. I was getting to think that maybe Fridays, the end of everyone else's week, was not the best time to start new folks in the program.

I had taken to doing what I called "rounds". When not cleaning apartments etc, I would drive around the neighborhood and pop in on people to see how they were doing. I would do this until it got too late, at which time I would walk around, not wanting to disturb our new neighbors, and check to see whose lights were on and whose were off. Most of the time our folks stayed up until the wee hours, but then would sleep late the next day.

As I came back to my office, I realized that I had not seen Bill that evening. Even though it was getting on into the night, I figured I would check on him. The light was on, so I knocked on the door quietly. There was no answer. After trying several times, getting increasingly loud with my knocks, I tried the door. It was open. I called, "Bill", but got no answer. Bill's unit was a flat and his bedroom was on the ground floor, so I walked into the apartment towards the direction of Bill's bedroom. The light was on in their, and the door ajar. I called his name again, with no answer. Through the crack in the door, I could see Bill's feet on his bed. Concerned, I opened the door.

Bill was lying on his bed fully clothed. One lamp was lit and covered with a red cloth. Bill was sprawled out like Jesus on the cross with one arm hanging off the side of the bed. The sleeve of his shirt was rolled up, and there was some kind of cloth tied around the upper arm. A needle protruded from his arm.

I yelled, "Bill", and ran over to the bed. I shook him a few times to see if he would wake up. He did not move. I carefully pulled the needle from his arm and put it on the nightstand. The idea that he was probably dead suddenly came to mind. I put my ear against his chest to see if he was breathing. His chest rose slowly, but it did rise. I ran from Bill's apartment, and next door to the office to call the ambulance.

The ambulance came and took the comatose Bill away on a stretcher. I did not realize it until after he was gone how hard my heart was pounding. I called Mary at home to let her know. She took it remarkably well. I guess Bill had a history of this sort of thing. Surprising!

I did not think I would see Bill again, but by the next weekend he was back. I started to spend a lot of time around him to keep an eye on him. When he wasn't out cold he was a pretty nice guy.

Things were quiet for awhile, but a few weeks later as I was doing my rounds I found his front door wide open. I went in and found him on the floor in front of the refrigerator. The door was open, and a jar of pickles had broken. Bill was lying in a big puddle of pickle juice. At least I did not see a needle this time. Having dealt with this before, and expecting it again, I was a lot more calm this time. Again, I checked him out to make sure he was alive, again I called the ambulance and again I called Mary. Later that night the police came by and took my statement. I could read it on their face the disdain they had for people like Bill.

Bill was treated and released within 24 hours by the hospital, but was then immediately arrested. He spent the night in jail so Sunday morning I got a phone call from the police asking me to come and get him. I was apprehensive about this, thinking that it was not a good idea, but what was I going to do about it?

When I picked Bill up at the police station he was still dressed in his pickle juice soaked clothes. He smelled quite ripe. He still seemed quite out of it as we walked to the car. Evidently someone took offense to him, whether it was his odor or the fact that they just didn't like junkies, but at some point someone had stuffed some sort of pills up Bills nose. They were stuck up there pretty far and he was trying to get them out for the entire ride back to the program.

Bill couldn't live alone in our program so after a few weeks he got a roommate. And what a roommate he was. His name was Ted. Ted was in his mid-twenties, black, about 300 pounds and 6 feet tall. He was a big guy. Ted had big puffy cheeks and a way of squinting so it looked like he was walking around with his eyes closed much of the time. It was probably one of the worst match ups as far as roommates went Ted and Bill. They did not like each other and constantly got on each other's nerves, which was a dangerous thing.

When Ted got upset he had a habit of hitting himself in the head, really hard. He would also scream at the top of his lungs, things like, "I'm going to cut my penis off", and "I wish my mom had had an abortion". When he got this way he was frightening to watch. Little things could provoke him and we got used to hearing Ted act this way. We called it his "Litany". One time I took Ted grocery shopping. Something was upsetting Ted, and we had taken no more than 4 steps in to the store when Ted launched into his litany. Ted and I had a good relationship, and most of the time I was able to calm him down. I can tell you that as soon as Ted began yelling, "I'm going to cut my penis off", *everyone* in the store stopped what they were doing!

I found it best to talk encouragingly and softly to Ted when he was like this. Luckily I was able to get Ted outside and then talk him down. Much of the time Ted just wanted to be listened to, and a lot of the time he got upset when he just didn't understand something. I thought Ted was more mentally retarded than mentally ill, but what did I know?

After awhile I began to find Ted's outbursts somewhat amusing, as long as he didn't hurt himself or do his thing in any public places. Bill, on the other hand, could not take it. Perhaps that was Mary's plan, to get rid of Bill by pairing him with Ted, but after a few weeks Bill moved out. Ted's outbursts decreased somewhat after that and I never saw Bill again. Lots of people came and went like that.

One day in the community room, Ted became very upset at one of the other residents for some reason. He began yelling and this resident began laughing which only provoked Ted more. Ted picked up a lamp and threw it at the other client, missing their head by inches. It was the first and last time I had seen Ted become that physical. I couldn't talk Ted down and I wasn't about to try and restrain him alone, so I had to call the ambulance. When the ambulance arrived ( with the police in tow ), Ted immediately calmed down. I was glad, because despite how he could be, I liked Ted. I didn't want to see him hurt.

Later that night I got a call from the hospital. The Dr. said that he had assessed Ted, and felt that he was safe to discharge. I could tell by the Dr.'s tone of voice that he was about 12 and that the ink was probably still wet on his PhD. I explained to the Dr. that Ted had just thrown a *lamp* at someone and this did not make me feel really comfortable about how *safe* Ted was only hours after the incident. Once Ted got this way he could have a series of "aftershock" type behaviors.

The Dr. proceeded with one of the famous, "well, I'm the Dr, and who are you?" speeches. I said "fine, I will come and get Ted. BUT I required that the Dr sign a release stating that Ted was safe to return and that in his estimation Ted was not going to *hurt* anyone". The Dr. said "Huh?". Clearly this had him back pedaling a moment. The Dr. said, "why do you need such a thing"? So I went on to explain how we were structured and how Ted lived with a roommate ( he was still with Bill at the time ) and how I was an uneducated, untrained employee, and the only one on, and that we could not accept the *liability* if something happened, so if the Dr. felt like Ted could be discharged, *he* would have to take the liability. The Dr. agreed to keep Ted overnight for observation.

More people were moving in, and still others were moving out. We had this young black guy, Frank, who did not make it past his first weekend. In doing my rounds and checking on folks one Saturday afternoon, I noticed that Frank's windows were all black. When I opened the door I was hit in the face by a thick pall of gray smoke. Long black strings like spider webs hung off the ceiling and walls. On the stove, a frying pan had literally melted into a piece of slag. Frank was passed out cold on the couch.

Luckily for me this was a Saturday that Mary was working. I quickly drove down to her office, which was close by, to notify her and call the fire department, but not before dragging the out cold Frank from the apartment and lying him on the grass.

Mary was too freaked out to be mad, and so again, I averted her wrath. She checked out Frank, while I investigated the apartment. The burner on the stove had gotten so hot it had burned itself out. The walls throughout the apartment were coated in a thick black soot, and those stringy

things were everywhere. I opened the windows, and as there was not much else to do, went outside to join Mary. As I was walking out I noticed the empty liquor bottles on the counter.

Outside, Frank was coming too. Mary had checked him out and was just sitting on the grass. I sat down too. In the distance I could hear the sirens coming.

The ambulance came and took Frank away. I never saw him again, nor heard anything about him. The firemen used a big fan to air out the apartment and they shut off the circuit breakers, but aside from that there was not much else to be done. The apartment would require a lot of work before it was habitable again, painting and the like. I knew that it was likely I would get stuck with much of that work.

Frank's roommate's name was John, and since he was now alone and his apartment ruined we moved him in with Ted. John was a short stocky guy who obviously at one time used to work out and a slow, deliberate, way of talking reminiscent of Vinny Barbarino on *Welcome Back Kotter*. Like most of our clients he was a young guy, but a person who looked like he had seen a lot. He had a hard time focusing, like he was trying to distract himself from some TV show running in his head.

Mary hadn't had any more blow ups like the one she had with Lorraine, but she could get easily irritated and go from zero to mean in 3 seconds flat. She especially liked to do this in front of other people, and especially to Shirley. Most staff meetings had a Shirley bashing session. But Shirley just sat there and took it. I was not immune however.

One day Mary asked me to organize the keys. With so many apartments, we had a lot of keys. There were two main sets, one that Mary had, and one that everyone else used. We had a small garbage pail full of keys. I thought it didn't make sense going door to door trying one key after another, so I sat with the main set that I had and matched them up. I thought this was quite clever of me, but evidently Mary did not think so, and evidently it wasn't quite as effective as I might have thought, and some of them were mismatched. Mary had a "bird" as they used to say. So occasionally, all of us sooner or later felt the heat of Mary's anger. It was strange how she could be so nice sometimes, and then downright mean at others. She was a strange one.

It was now getting on late summer. A local farmer had donated a portion of his corn fields to charity, and we were the charity. We could do whatever we wanted to with the corn, but there was one catch. We had to pick it. We needed the money more than we needed the corn, so we had arranged to sell it at a local farmers market. I rounded up a bunch of the willing and off we went to pick corn.

There was a lot of corn, and much of it didn't look too good, it looked like cow corn, but John liked it; I couldn't get him to stop eating it, raw. We had borrowed a broken down truck and commenced to filling it up, and thus, for the next several Saturday mornings, in addition to my other responsibilities, I was a farmer. We would pick the corn and then spend all day Sunday selling it. The money raised was used to buy things for the program, like a new color TV for the

“community room “.

Two more clients moved in and then two more after that. We were well on our way to twenty. Additionally, the surrounding units were becoming occupied too, so it wasn't before too long there was bound to be a run in with the neighbors.

Tony was a young guy and wanted what every young man wants, sex, a car, music and money ( in that order ), and he had befriended some of the neighborhood teenagers. At first I found him just talking to one or maybe having a couple kids over his house to listen to music, but after awhile there was quite a crowd hanging out there. Charlie didn't seem to mind, but I don't think he would say shit if he had a mouthful. Some of the kids looked like punks, and while I didn't want to dissuade Tony from making friends, I kept an eye on things because I did not like the way this was going.

One day, I found a bunch of the kids spilling out of Tony's place. They were all laughing, while Tony came to the door with a frown. He was saying goodbye, but he was not himself. I walked up as the kids walked away. I said, “hey, Tony”. He said, “hey”. I said, “what's up”? But he just walked away back in the house mumbling. I walked in the house behind him and I could see that the backdoor was open and there were chairs out there. I said, “Tony what's wrong?”, Tony walked into his living room and sat on the couch. He said, quietly, “they broke it”. “Broke what, Tony?”, I asked. He didn't reply but just nodded to the open door. I walked over and looked into the backyard. There up against a tree was a broken guitar. One of the kids had obviously smashed it against the tree.

“Tony”, I began to say, but then didn't know what to say. “I'm sorry” was all I could muster. Tony got up and simply said, “I'm going upstairs now”, and he did. I just stood there in his living room for a couple of minutes unsure what to do.

After that I kept a much more watchful eye on the local kids. They avoided Tony for the most part after that, and I know that Mary had consulted with the police. Mary had me join the local neighborhood watch. She and I went to a couple of meetings, but despite the crime in the neighborhood it seemed like the Watches biggest concern was us!

As the summer heated up so did things in the neighborhood. First, Jims apartment was broken into and a large jar of change stolen. A few weeks after that, our secondary office, where we stored the furniture and what-not, was also broken into. A television was stolen along with some other small items. I was afraid that someone would try to break into the staff office area and steal the medications we kept in there, or that I would become a target because I was always driving around the complex and watching what was going on. I became very alert to everything that was going on.

One morning I left Jim's apartment and went to the Community Room/staff office. I checked

Mary's office door as I had begun to do because of the break-ins, and all was well there. I had only been in the staff office for a short period of time when the phone rang. It was Mary. She asked me if everything was alright, and I said that it was. She sounded upset. She told me that her office had been robbed and that the police were on their way. I said, "What!?". Suddenly, a million questions were going on around my head. The first one to make it out was "How do you know"? I mean, I was here and she was home, how could she know something I didn't?

She told me that the police had called her because a neighbor had found a box in their backyard with checks in it. A trail ran from the back of that neighbor's yard into the woods. She told me to cooperate with the police when they got there and that she was on her way.

When the police arrived, and I met them at Mary's office. I had the key and opened the still locked door. Inside, Mary's office "living room" which had been furnished with attractive furniture and the like, was trashed. The rear door was wide open and a table was flipped upside down. There were several liquor bottles on the floor as if somebody had had a party in there. The police went upstairs and I followed.

Mary's office door had been kicked in and smashed; she had only put a lock on it a few weeks before. Her desk drawers were all turned upside down and their contents everywhere. The other office there too, where the clients' records were kept, had also been ransacked.

Mary came by shortly and confirmed that the only thing missing was the money box. Mary would cash the clients' checks for them and then keep the cash in her desk. When someone needed money they would go see Mary as if she was their private bank. In this way, Mary ensured that the clients had money for food and such, and not just cigarettes. Several times a week the clients would line up and get their "allowance". This money was gone. I was shocked to learn that Mary had several thousands of dollars in there. There had been some checks too, which the thieves discarded, but all of the money was gone.

The police seemed to think that it was someone who knew the money was there, and I began to fear that their suspicion would fall on me. Some detectives came up and interviewed me at length. They asked me about my prior criminal history, which there wasn't one, and asked me if I would take a lie detector test. I said that I would.

In the meantime, the police were checking out the kids in the neighborhood, especially the ones who had broken Tony's guitar, which I of course told them about. They were operating on the idea that perhaps Tony had mentioned the money to them, or that somehow these kids had heard about it. After a few weeks though, there was no new news.

The detective contacted me and asked me to go in for a polygraph. I was as nervous as hell, not because I had anything to be guilty for, but afraid that somehow I would be blamed. It was probably not the best idea, but to calm myself down I had a few drinks before I went to the police station. They put me in one of those little rooms like you see on television, with the one way mirror. The detective hooked me up to this machine, first strapping some coiled thing around my



chest, then some other kinds of attachments, and lastly these little clips on the ends of my fingers. He asked me some basic questions first, they were all yes, or no, and then began to ask me questions about the robbery. I was sweating bullets. The cop ran through the same questions twice and the whole thing only took about 20 minutes.

When we were done, the cop said that he was going in the other room to read the results. I asked him if he would tell me the results when he was done, and looked at me and said with a sneer, “you’ll be the first to know”.

I sat there for what seemed like an eternity. The cop had forgotten to remove all the thing-a-ma-bobs from me and so I couldn’t move. When he came back in, he began to undo the connections and asked him, “well?”. He kept doing what he was doing, and simply said, “the results were inconclusive”. By this time I was free and I stood up, afraid to ask, “what does that mean”? He said, I will discuss this with my partner and we will contact you again if we want to talk to you. I never heard from them again.

Weeks went by, and I stopped asking Mary if there was any new information. The cops had gotten a partial print of one of the liquor bottles, and they were exploring that angle, but no closer to solving the crime. It never was solved.

Jim had moved out of the apartment on site, and while he still stayed there throughout the week, there was nothing in it of his personal belongings. Things were quiet for a long time, and summer began to give way to autumn. I had put the robbery behind me, but every once and awhile, when the phone rang, I would remember that the cops said that they would be in touch.

We had our first women move in, Alicia and Doreen. They were a breath of fresh air. Somehow, it didn’t seem so much like I was running some strange hobo hotel with them around.

Alicia was a grizzled old women for whom it looked life had been hard. She was short and slim with white hair, and a collection of various facial ticks. She could be down right mean. Doreen was in some ways her opposite. She was tall and very heavysset. She was getting on in years herself with her hair a concealed gray. She had false teeth but rarely wore them. In contrast to Alicia’s being a curmudgeon, Doreen was almost motherly. Alicia and Doreen didn’t get along, but I don’t think anyone could have lived with Alicia.

One day shortly after them moved in I was taking all the folks grocery shopping. Alicia and I were walking between the cars taking the shortest distance to the front of the store. I turned to see where the rest of the clients were, and there is Alicia squatting between the cars with her dress hiked up. A yellow puddle was forming beneath her. She had on no underwear and was peeing right there in the parking lot.

Needless to say Alicia and Doreen didn’t live together long. Alicia was given a small apartment of her own, a one bedroom, and another woman moved in with Doreen. Her name was Helen.

Helen was also older. She didn't seem ill at all, but she had been in the hospital quite a long time. It seems that she had killed her mother-in-law.

Helen was very outgoing and sociable, and soon Helen and Doreen's apartment became the social spot. Many of the older men would visit them on a regular basis, and it appeared that Helen and Dan were having some sort of relationship.

I was curious about Doreen, because she didn't really seem sick either, so I took a closer look at her file. Evidently, Doreen had delusions of grandeur when she was sick and thought she was Betty Gable. Doreen had told me that she once had been young and beautiful and a model. I thought to myself, "there's her delusion kicking in again", but then one day when I was helping Helen and Doreen with something or other in their apartment, I saw a picture of a very pretty woman on an end table. Making small talk, I asked Helen, who was closest to me, who it was, and she did not know. I then asked Doreen. It was Doreen! She had indeed been beautiful.

Other folks were moving in. There was Melvin, and Liz, and Linda and Brian. Some people did not last long, others did very well.

Linda was fat, squat and ugly. She was also real slow, and also kinda mean. With more woman in the program some of the clients were beginning to hook up, and Linda and John had become an item. With Linda it was her way or no other, and soon she ran afoul of Mary.

Now, mind you the program was supposed to be voluntary. No one was required to live here, but it made it easier for people to leave the hospital if they were going to get residential supports. Everyone knew that they had to be in the program, if just for a little while, and many of them were often talking about leaving. There were rules in the program, like you had to have a job. There were also curfews and alcohol was forbidden.

One Friday night I noticed that a lot of the younger guys were gone. I had over heard them taking earlier in the day and they had said that they wanted to go check out a local bar, a bar within walking distance. I was suspicious that all these same guys were now not around. I called Mary, and she directed me to go check out the bar. I felt really uncomfortable about this, but I complied.

I drove the van down and walked in. It was a small dark place with only a few tables and stools, and sure enough there was our guys all sitting around having beer. Their eyes nearly popped out of their heads when they saw me, and Melvin spewed beer across the table. Not knowing what I was going to do or going to say, I simply pulled up a chair and sat down. "Hey there guys. How's it going?" I asked. They all started to get up and were tripping over themselves and their tongues. "We were just leaving", they each said at some point when they could speak clearly.

Well, Linda was not going to have any part of these rules and so Mary gave her an ultimatum. Linda did not care, and so she moved out. She also convinced John to move out too and they both got an apartment together. John was kind of one of Mary's favorites, and she did not like the

fact that he had moved out. One day Mary called me into her office and told me to go down to their apartment and try to convince John to return. Mary was always giving me these types of things, and while it sucked, I complied.

They were living in the worst part of town in a really rundown apartment building, and up on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor to boot. I found their apartment and knocked on the door. I heard John say “who is it”? “Its me, John, Its Scott”. There was a long pause. “What do you want?” came next. “Open the door John, I just want to talk to you”. I replied. Again, a long pause. “What do you want?”, John said again. Suddenly screaming erupted in the background, a woman’s voice, Linda’s voice. “Tell that muthafucka to fuckin leave”, she bellowed. John said, in a normal tone of voice “uh, I think you should leave”. “Come on, John. Just give me a few minutes to talk to you one on one”. I’m gonna kill that muthafucka” came the reply. Something hit the other side of the door loudly. “Tell Mary I will give her a call” John said.

Seeing that I was getting nowhere and that Linda was escalating, I thought departure was the better part of valor. Hey, I had tried. I heard Linda still yelling as I went downstairs, “asshole...”

Mary heard from John a few times after that, but I never saw him again, though I saw Linda one time at a distance at the grocery store.

Brian was a young man that I thought did not belong in the program. He absolutely refused to work, and spent most of his days sleeping. He had this friend that came to visit him quite a bit, a young guy that was a few years older than Brian. I was very suspicious that something was going on between these two of a sexual nature, but since they were both adults I didn’t pry too much, but just kept a weather eye out.

It was now getting to be late fall. Tony had started to hang around with the neighborhood kids again. Albeit only one or two people at a time. Tony wanted friends and Tony had a car. One night he came to see me in the office. His eye was freshly bruised and quite purple. According to Tony he had accidentally cut some guy off on the highway, and the guy followed him back to his apartment and assaulted him. Tony really couldn’t say what the guy looked like ( or wouldn’t say ) so even though I called the police, it was a moot effort. Tony didn’t want to go to the hospital, and since his eye didn’t look too bad, I acquiesced and simply administered first aid.

One Saturday afternoon, Tony came to see me. He quietly said without any emotion that his car was gone. I said “what do you mean?” He told me that his car had been parked out front, but that now it was gone. Thinking that it had been stolen I called the police.

I don’t think that Tony thought that I would call the cops, because while we were waiting, he said “ I have a confession to make”. I said, “oh, what’s that?”. He said “I loaned the car to some friends of mine”, but that was yesterday and I haven’t heard from them”. I said, “did you loan it to those same kids who broke your guitar by any chance?” He didn’t say anything, but looked at the ground and nodded his head, barely perceptibly. I said, “Tony, how could you? Why?” But

these were really rhetorical questions.

When the police came I told them exactly what happened. They knew the kids in question from previous run ins they had had with the law. They took our statements and left.

After a few hours I got a call from the police. They said that they had found Tony's car and that it had been abandoned just around the corner. They had also found the kids, who reported that it had run out of gas, and that's why it was where it was.

Since it was close by, I went and collected Tony to go and get it. It was right where the cops said it was. It didn't look in bad shape. It was sitting off the side of the road in the grass. Tony had called his father who came out and met us. His father had a spare key, so we were able to get inside the car. Sure enough the gas gauge was empty. Tony's father had brought along a container of gas. I opened the gas tank to put the gas in and noticed a white powder all on the inside rim of the gas tank. It looked like sugar. I cautiously tasted a small amount and sure enough, it was sugar.

Well, the car wasn't about to start, not with sugar in the tank, and we did not want to add more fuel to the tank, so Tony's father, a very nice, and patient man, called and had the car towed to a garage.

When the garage opened the next week and the mechanics checked it out, they confirmed that the gas tank was full of sugar. Worse than that, they had poured the sugar in when there had been gas in the tank and drove it, so now the sugar and gas mixture had congealed throughout the engine. The car was ruined.

Tony was normally a quiet person and it at first seemed to take the news quite well. I had never seen Tony get upset, and it often seemed that it was afraid to get really emotional at all. Well, I guess the situation with the car was too much for him. A couple of days after learning about his cars condition, he was found screaming and yelling in the street. Neighbors called the police. When the police arrived Tony told them that he was going to kill himself. Tony could be nasty when upset according to his file and he showed this side of himself to the police. They took him into custody and right to the ER. Within 24 hours he was back in the hospital.

Unlike some, Tony would come back however. In the meantime, things went on, business as usual. Evidently the State was happy with they way things were going and were going to give us more money to support more people. There was talk about opening up another apartment type program, but for even more needy people, and a day program of some sort.

In anticipation of Mary had hired another nurse to work with her. Her name was Gloria and she was young and kinda cute, but very serious. In many ways she was like Mary. I could see that sparks would fly. Mary instantly made her everyone's boss. I didn't like her because, while she was nice, she was trying to prove herself to Mary and had to boss people around. I mostly kept out of her way.

I could tell right away that Gloria was smart and I concluded that a smart woman like that would soon get Mary's number and leave. That's exactly what happened. Gloria stayed all of a few months.

Autumn gave way to winter and winter to spring. The changing of the season brought new issues and new challenges. It made going around to the apartments in the van more difficult with the snow. In addition, the van was diesel so it had an electrical plug just under the hood and when it was cold we had to plug it in every night.

One night I was walking in the snow going from house to house when I fell and sprained my ankle. When the snow fell the City did a poor job of cleaning it, so I had taken to walking the neighborhood instead. Fortunately, I was near to my office having just finished up my last rounds for the day. I managed to hobble over to the office and let myself in. I then called Mary at home to tell her what had happened. I did not think I was going to be in any shape to finish out the weekend.

Mary was, as usual, unsympathetic. She said, "well, you will just have to work out the remainder of your shift, and figure out how to make it work". There is no one to cover for you". I could not believe my ears. In hindsight I look back and can't believe that I did not tell Mary to take her job and shove it. It goes to show how young and naive I was.

There was no way I could do my job, not on my own. After speaking with Mary and realizing this was not going to get me anywhere, I suggested that perhaps my now wife, but then fiancé, could come and help me. Mary, relieved to not have to deal with this, OK'd the idea. I only had to work out Sunday anyway and Sundays were usually quiet. Lynn came in and helped me by going around to the clients apartments telling them they would have to come to the office for the medications (none of them had phones ). She also helped me take them grocery shopping. I stayed in the van while she went in with them.

This was not the last snow related problem. One Friday on the way to work, just down the street from my house, I lost control of my car and skidded off the road. We had about 10 inches of snow with more expected. My car was stuck good, and I could not get it out of the snow bank it was stuck in. I called a few tow truck companies, but they were all busy. None of them could come out. I had to call Mary with the news and I knew she would not take it well.

Mary was livid. She said "you have to go in, there is no one else to work". I said "what about Jim, or any of the other staff?". She said, "Jim is just coming off working a double already because of the snow". After going back and forth like this, I finally said, somewhat testily, "well, Mary, what is it you want me to do? I have already tried to get a tow. No one is going to give me a ride in this weather". I almost fell on the floor when she said "call the state police".

I said, "What?!". She said, "sure, call the police or the local ambulance service. That's how Drs get into work at the hospital and they can't make it in". I didn't bother to point out the flaw in her

logic – I wasn't a Doctor, but I complied. I made a valiant effort to call several ambulance companies, as well as the state and local police. If they didn't hang up on me, they laughed at me. I tried to explain about the whole Doctor thing, but they pointed out I wasn't a Doctor.

After exhausting the possibilities, I called Mary back. This time she was calm. Frighteningly so. She said "well, if there is nothing you can do, I will just have to get someone else to do it". She then quickly added, "but I am not going to forget this and I am going to write you up". Which she did. The next time I saw her she had a disciplinary warning to sign. I couldn't believe she was writing me up for this. Exactly what was I supposed to have done? It wasn't fair at all. I *really* started to dislike Mary, wait...dislike is too weak a word here. I began to hate Mary, but she would get hers in time.

Things began to pick up apace. We had a fairly stable group of folks living with us. Stable in the sense that they were making it and doing OK. Then one day something happened to shatter that. Steve, the young kid, rarely used to leave his apartment. Most of the time he just looked like a zombie. It was everything we could do just to get him to do his laundry or go shopping, never mind working. He stayed all day and just slept. I never understood why Mary allowed this.

One day Steve was missing. We called the police and his parents, but none of them could think where to look. Even his friend had no idea where he might be. Then we learned that Steve had gotten hold of a big benefits check. Unlike the others that come for him, which came to the office, this one went to his house. It was for thousands of dollars as Steve had been with us for a year with little income coming in. Oh, and Steve had a cocaine problem.

A few days later Steve was found wandering the streets in a daze. He couldn't even speak. His money was gone and he had a small amount of cocaine on him. He was picked up by the police, but since he was clearly a mental health consumer, they turned him over to the hospital who in turn turned him back over to the psychiatric hospital. It would be a solid year before Steve would be well enough to leave the hospital.

Some of the things Mary had been talking about, new programs and the like, started to come true. New apartments were being secured, and new staff hired. Other new changes that occurred included the hiring of a psychologist/consultant. His name was Shaun. Shaun was young and kinda hip. He was somewhat fresh out of psychology school, with the ink still wet on his Phd. He had a soft way of speaking, but with a talent for insightful comments at the right time. I liked him right away. Shaun's role was to help us be better at helping our clients, so he was really our psychologist, which I thought was a grand idea and I spoke with Shaun at every opportunity I could.

We met with Shaun weekly as a group, Mary included. At this time it was still just me, Shirley, Jim, and Rhonda, though new people would be joining us very soon. One week the topic Shaun wanted to cover was "confrontation", basically how to tell people the truth to their faces in such a way to not be impolite. Shaun wanted us to role-play and we went around the room pretending to confront each other with our concerns. I was the last to go. I couldn't think of anything to

confront anyone with, except Mary. Mary had been on a tear lately, not so much with me, but with Shirley and Rhonda, but I was tired of seeing it. It wasn't right. The idea of confronting Mary began to grow in my mind. I felt comfortable knowing that Shaun would be there to moderate, so this emboldened me somewhat, but at the same time I knew it was probably suicide, but I couldn't think of anything else. I began to obsess about it, and when my turn came I found myself confronting Mary on her behavior. You could tell by the look in everyone's eyes, that this was not the way it was supposed to go, but I didn't stop. I couldn't stop. I was like a man possessed, watching myself say and do things that I had no control over.

Shaun tried to put a good spin on what I was saying, but I could see that Mary was going to have a melt down. She began beet red and the veins were bulging at the side of her neck. Her mouth moved like a fish gulping for air, but it couldn't keep up fast enough with whatever her mind was thinking. Finally, she simply stood up, threw her note book on her seat, and ran from the room. I could tell that she was wiping tears from her eyes as she left and went into her office.

Shaun stopped the session. Everyone left the meeting, stunned. Shaun spoke with me a long time afterwards about what happened. I think mostly to convince himself that what happened was OK. However, Mary never brought it up to me and it was like it never happened. I have to say that I was surprised to get this reaction. Our meetings with Shaun after that took on a more academic and controlled discussion of topics.

New folks joined our team, coming on early before the new clients came on board, just as I had begun. There was Candy. When I first heard her name, I thought she would be hot, but she wasn't. She seemed nice enough, though she had no experience. Candy's job before this had been to drive a school bus and she had a rough and tumble, almost masculine air about her.

Another new edition to our team was Kenny. Kenny moved into Jim's apartment, which Jim had mostly vacated after the break-in. Jim stayed in the apartment when he was working, but it was no longer his primary abode. Now it was Kenny's. Kenny had been a shelter "guest" for quite some time. He was in "recovery" for years of alcohol use and abuse, which finally left him destitute and homeless, at rock bottom as they say. Kenny had found sobriety and a new leash on life, but he looked like someone who had had a hard life. Kenny was short, with a quick wit and he could roll with the punches. He became a trusted member of our team; the go to guy when things got tough. He was good friends with Father Casta too.

New clients began to move in too. One day, I went to work to find a guy named Daryl in the Community Room. He was all by himself just sitting. The TV was on, but he was rocking in his chair ( which was not a rocker ) looking out the window. There was a note from Mary on the communal desk we all shared. The note said that I was to help Daryl get cleaned up and into some new, clean clothes. I looked at Daryl and realized that he was filthy. I wondered where he came from and how he had just shown up like this, but all of this was par for the course. With everything I had experienced, nothing fazed me now.

Daryl was as thin as a beanpole. He never stopped moving. He had close cropped blonde hair and

stubs for teeth, at least in the front. I tried speaking to Daryl and asked him question, but I did not get an answers, only grunts that sounded like “yeah”, no matter what I asked. I got Daryl to follow me upstairs where we had a bunch of clothes we kept handy, sometimes the people came from the hospital did not have much. I selected a few things that looked like they’d fit. Then I had to try and get Daryl in the shower.

It was like trying to get a dog to go in the shower, simply by asking him to. Daryl gave no appearance that he understood me or even heard me. He just kept pacing back and forth like some sort of caged animal. I resorted to pantomime and modeled him taking off his clothes and getting in the shower. I even put out soap and a towel in hopes that he would get the idea. Then I thought, perhaps he is shy, so I left the room for a few minutes and stood in the hallway. When I came back, Daryl was sitting on the bed, still dressed.

Daryl was holding a wallet, which he handed me when I came in. I took it and looked inside. There was a state photo ID of him, a few ancient looking receipts, a condom that didn’t look like it had ever seen the light of day and a voter registration guard. A voter registration card! I couldn’t believe it. I had a hard time imagining him ever being lucid enough to register to vote.

I went back to pretending that I was taking off my clothes and putting on new clothes. I even tried to physically help Daryl, but he was clearly not going to let me, I really didn’t want to anyway. Suddenly Darryl jumped up. He grabbed the jeans I was pretending to put on, and he began to put them on, over the jeans he was already wearing! I decided to give up trying to get Daryl to shower and change.

Mary came in later that day, so I asked her what the story was with Daryl. She said that he had a lengthy history of “eloping” ( read: escaping ) from Fairview Hospital and that he had recently done it again, then he walked all the way to Watertown ( a very considerable distance ). Since they clearly couldn’t keep him at the hospital, since he kept getting away, they were going to try him out in the supervised apartment program.

I, quite professionally I believe, explained to Mary the experience I had with Daryl, and let her know that in my considered opinion Daryl was not yet ready to be living in his own apartment, or anywhere that did not have 24 hour direct supervision. Unfortunately, my comments fell on deaf ears.

Despite the fact that I was young, not a psychologist, and not listened to, did not make me wrong. I took Daryl shopping and it was quite a scene. I insisted in controlling the cart while Daryl ran up and down the isles, with a sort of lilting gait, and “yeahing” all the time. He just grabbed anything and everything that caught his fancy - whole sides of beef, several gallons of ice cream etc - and put these in the carriage. I, on the other hand, walked around taking them back out. In this way it took us several hours to shop.

Back at his apartment this behavior continued. Daryl spun around his apartment, doing laps, as I attempted to put his groceries away. No sooner did I have something in the fridge he was in after



it. He grabbed the gallon of milk and began hooching it in a major way. I grabbed it from him, splashing some on the floor and on me, but by that time he had already drank most of it. Then he was after the cold cuts, grabbing an entire pound of bologna and putting all of it in his mouth at once.

That night Daryl was up all night, pacing around inside his house. I could see him inside through the windows as I drove by. I made a point to drive by more regularly to check on him. Once or twice I found him in the street and I shooed him back inside.

Much of the time, when people would move into the program, they would appear one way, and then later on their true selves would emerge. I was hoping that Daryl would calm down after a few days, but he didn't.

The second day Daryl was already in trouble with his neighbors because they had seen him get into their unlocked car and fish around for cigarette butts in their ashtray. Luckily I diffused that one without the police being involved and without Daryl and me getting beaten up.

I couldn't keep it up for long however, as I couldn't be with Daryl every second of the day. A few days later, or really nights, Daryl got arrested. It seems that he had been walking down the street trying different doors until one opened and he went inside. The only problem was that it was occupied and Daryl walked right past the startled couple living there to help himself to whatever was in their icebox.

Clearly, the police did not want to deal with Daryl, so they turned him ( quite quickly, I may add ) to the mental health people who turned him right back over to us. I slapped myself in the head when I saw that he was back. I think the psychologists needed mental health treatment if they thought this guy could live in the community.

This time Daryl was a little bit better behaved, at least for a few weeks. Come to find out that Daryl had a propensity to swallow things he shouldn't and that most people *couldn't*, such as pens, forks and things of this nature. While Daryl's nocturnal activities decreased his gustatory interests increased, and before long Daryl had swallowed a fork. For a few weeks the cycle was the same. Daryl would swallow something long thin and sharp, he would go to the hospital to have it removed ( often they could go down his throat and grab it, but sometimes surgery was required ), Daryl would be assessed by a psychologist at the local hospital ( who I am sure, wanted nothing to do with Daryl ), and two days later, Daryl was back with us. This sort of thing went on for several weeks. No one could explain why he was doing it, and nothing seemed to make him stop.

Then one day Daryl swallowed the metal spring from the inside of a toilet paper roll holder. I guess this was the straw that broke the camels back. Spoons, OK, Pencils, OK, but NO on big metal spring. Thus Daryl was sent back to Fairview Hospital, at least for awhile.

However, he was not the only new client to keep us busy.

About the same time that Daryl moved in, so did Michael. Michael was in his late thirties with a balding comb-over. He had deep set dark eyes and a way of not looking at you that made him look like he was seeing things on another plane. Michael was always anxious. He walked with his head dropped and his brow constantly furrowed. He had a propensity to ask you questions that you did not know how to answer like, “I am going to die, Scott?” I didn’t want to say no, because it was a lie, at the same time if I said yes, it would give him just one more thing to worry about.

Michael wasn’t a management problem like Daryl; pretty much he kept to himself. What worried me about Michael is that he had a car and he drove. Also Michael also had some of the most active hallucinations of anyone I have ever met. Mostly, they were auditory hallucinations. He would constantly hear a gaggle of voices calling him names or ranting religious statements. Michael also told me that angels followed him. He said they rode in the back seat when he was driving and he was afraid to turn around because if he saw them he would die. Michael worried about religion a lot. Generally I found that if you tried to reason with him, discuss his hallucinations or engage him in religious talk, it only made him worse. One day the Jehovah Witnesses came around and visited Michael. It took him nearly three weeks to get over it.

We were well into our second year. We had a fairly good-sized group of “regulars”, people who were relatively stable and who looked like they were going to stay awhile. However, who was a roommate with who became quite a topic. The grapevine hummed with talk of nocturnal visitations by some of the men to some of the woman and inter-roommate squabbles were a daily occurrence.

When it got bad enough, Mary would agree to let people change roommates. In one of these swaps a young woman named Liz moved into the apartment with Doreen.

Liz looked like she was about 12, and acted that way too. Though she could be smart as a whip when she wanted to be. She and Doreen hit it off quite well because Liz needed a surrogate mother and Doreen needed to be one.

Liz was the model client until one day she came to me and told me that young kids were hiding up in the bushes behind her apartment and that they had thrown eggs at her house. I walked with Liz to her apartment and sure enough there were egg guts all over the place.

At first I was not too alarmed, because there were a lot of kids in the area, and kids will be kids, but the behavior continued. So, I called the police, but they never came.

The egg throwing went on all day. Liz came to me each time to report it, and their targets seemed to be widening, other apartments started to get hit as well. I became really concerned when threatening notes began to show up in mailboxes later that weekend.

Each note was on a small sheet of gray paper with threatening statements in a child's wobbly handwriting, saying things like "you are all going to die". I again called the police, and again they failed to come. I went on extra vigilant alert, doing additional rounds and the like.

On the third day of this mysterious behavior, I was in Liz's room helping re-hang a curtain that had fallen down when I noticed a gray colored notepad on Liz's desk. It was the exact same sort of paper used for the threatening notes. I asked Liz to get me a screwdriver from my toolbox in the living room, and when she did, I looked at the pad.

By holding the pad up to the light, I could see that the force of the top note being written had indented into the next sheet of paper down. I could clearly read some of the text, which was the same as the last note. Suspicious, I quickly looked around Liz's room. Something made me think to look under the bed ( probably because there wasn't many other hiding places ). There I found several egg cartons, most of which were now empty. I had found my egg-throwing bandit.

I confronted her on the spot. Liz confessed that it was she. She had been crawling out the window to perform her tricks, and this is how the curtain had gotten pulled down. Her reaction was very childlike. At first she acted as though it were funny, but afterwards was quite remorseful, or at least she acted that way. I guess she just felt the need to add some drama to her daily routine. I was glad that the police did not come the two times I had called them!

## **THE MOVE**

Rumors began to circulate that the guy who owned the apartment complex was going to sell it. People in the neighborhood were abuzz. I had heard rumblings like this off and on, but nothing seemed concrete. I thought that even if it did happen, it wouldn't impact us, because we had so many apartments there. Surely somebody would want the knowledge of a secure rent from us.

Then one day Mary told me that she had a private meeting with the owner and that he indeed was going to sell the property. She said that it was still to be kept hush-hush because neither the seller nor the buyer was prepared to make it public yet. He spoke to Mary because he had had a relationship with us and wanted to give us a "heads-up". A few weeks later it was out. The property was sold.

Again, I didn't give it much thought. I was too busy with my job, and I did not think it would effect us. I was wrong. Shortly after the new owner came in, he payed a call on Mary. He wanted us to *buy* the units we were now renting. Condominiums were the new hot craze and this guy was looking to cash in. Personally, I though he was nuts. The place we were renting was only a step or two up from being a slum, and I couldn't imagine some rich yuppie type plunking down a bunch of money to live here.

I thought it would all blow over, but after a few weeks of negotiation it was official. We were pulling up our stakes and moving the whole thing; nearly 30 people would have to move.

## **ROSE HOUSE**

One day Mary announced that as part of the new development they were looking into the possibility of a group home. I thought it was strange that such comments would be dropped in such an off-handed way. There was no fanfare or anything like that, so you really did not know what was happening. The next thing I know they have a house and Mary is looking at furniture – very expensive and very nice furniture. That’s when I knew something was afoot.

I was vaguely aware how plans were coming for the new house, I was pretty busy with my work, and Mary only gave us breadcrumbs of information, but I was aware that the opening day was looming. I was curious as to what was happening in terms of the manager position, and staffing. I knew that Mary had been interviewing, but the addition of this home meant a substantial increase in the number of staff in the mental health program.

Then one day, just a few days before the stated opening of the home, Mary came to me and asked me to be the manager “temporarily”. I was eager for a promotion and better pay but this was the kinda thing that Mary could use to bury you - if things did not go well, and with new programs, as I had already experienced, something was absolutely bound to not go well. But I accepted anyway.

I heard nothing more about it for awhile. Working only weekends kept me somewhat out of the loop. I was aware that the opening had been delayed to allow for renovations to the home, a home I had still not seen. Mary had told me that there had been a “grand opening”, and an opening celebration. But somehow I was not invited. Finally, I said something and Mary took me, Jim and Shirley over to check it out. Mary informed us that the home was going to officially be called the Rose House, named after Father Castas mother.

The house was huge. Small for a mansion, but large for just a house. At one time it had been a one family home, but just before we took it over it had been 4 apartments. The house was all brick with white pillars in front and it sported a 4 bay garage.

The house reminded me of something out of the Brady Bunch. It had a 15 foot long dinning room with matching table ( it sat 12 people ), 2 living rooms, 6 bedrooms and a laundry room bigger than my first apartment. The furniture that Mary had bought was already in place. The place could have been in better homes and gardens. I was concerned that the place would soon be trashed by the folks that would be living there.

The philosophy behind the group home is that it supports individuals who need more supervision and assistance then the types of people we had been working with so far. The plan was for there

to be 8 clients, 4 men and 4 women, with two staff on each shift, except on thirds shift. As we toured the home, Mary announced that the clients would be moving in, in two days!

I was still busy setting up apartments for the people who had yet to move into the first programs, never mind set up a group home. I had become the principle furniture mover. While the furnishings were all in place, there was still much to do programmatically. There were also a lot of incidentals to purchase.

The next day, I was starting to come in weekdays now, in addition to my weekends ( with no additional pay mind you, this was *charity* after all ), Mary and I went shopping. We went to the local K-Mart where we each took 2 shopping carts. We had to buy towels, and curtains, and dishes, etc. When we checked out, they opened a special register for us. It took as long to check out as it did to shop.

We went to the home and dropped the stuff off, and we spent a few hours putting things away, but there was still much to do.

The next day people began to move in. Unlike the apartments, everyone moved in at once. Mary had gone ahead with Rhonda to greet people and help them settle in, while I gathered up office supplies and other last minute items. I really felt like I was rushed as well as being out of the loop. Shouldn't I be there, as the manager to greet everyone? Instead, I was sent shopping.

I had so much stuff to carry, that I ended up throwing it into one big garbage bag. I threw it over my shoulder and walked in feeling somewhat like Santa Clause. I walked into the kitchen and all the clients were there, one or two I had met before, but most I hadn't. It seemed like an inauspicious way to start a new position. I am one who believes in ceremony, and there was none here.

Despite my misgivings, the first few days went well. There was an interesting mix of people. There was Ted. Ted was in his 50's, thin, with a gray beard and short cropped hair. Ted liked to wear suits everyday and I think fancied himself somewhat of a dandy. Ted would write me letters everyday. You could tell what sort of mood Ted was in because his letters always started out the same way, "I am writing you this happy letter", or "I am writing you this miserable letter". At least you knew where he stood.

Then there was John A. John was like someone I had gone to high school with. He was young, only a few years younger than me, with long red hair and beard. There didn't seem to be anything wrong with John. He just struck me as the kind of guy who liked to drink and smoke pot.

There was another guy there named John too. This John, John B, was quiet with a strange physical build that made him look like a pear, he was strangely portly around the middle. John was in his late thirties with thinning hair and perpetually dirty fingers. In fact most of the folks who came out of the hospital were fairly easily recognized by their nicotine died yellow fingers.

John had a problem that was quite bizarre sounding to me; water intoxication. He had a propensity to drink too much water, like gallons, which threw off his chemical balance to the point he actually became intoxicated. To ensure this didn't happen we had to weigh John everyday.

Rounding out the men was Adam. Adam spoke no English, only Spanish. He was a short guy, only about 5 feet tall, with a perpetual smile on his face and about 45 years old. He seemed like a nice enough guy, but he just didn't seem to fit in with the others. While on the surface he appeared to be friendly enough I later learned from reading his chart that Adam had nearly severed his younger sisters leg with a knife.

The four men shared one side of the house. There were three men in what we called the "dorm", and one man, Ted – by virtue of his age - got a room alone. The men were separated from the women by two doors and a hallway.

On the women's side there was Wendy. Wendy was the female counterpart to John. She seemed to me like a chick who had just done too many drugs. She was young and short with curly black hair. Most of the time she was fairly affable, but when she was in one of her moods she would sulk about and claim to be hallucinating.

The second of the four women was Robin. Robin was a cute young black woman. She was tall and probably in her early twenties. Robin had very bad asthma to the point that it made her incapable of doing almost anything. I really felt sorry for her, as she was such a nice young woman.

The last of the original women was Tina ( we were supposed to have 8 clients, 4 of them women, but in the very beginning only 3 of the 4 women moved in ). Tina was special. She was in her late thirties, squat and about 5 feet 1' or so. She had a protruding belly that made it look like she was pregnant. Her face was usually knit together in a look like that of someone who just eaten an entire lemon in one bite. She had no teeth and when she opened her mouth to speak, it was nothing short of a bellow. Tina almost constantly yelled, oh and she liked to curse at you at the top of her lungs too. Nothing made her happy. All she wanted to do was smoke cigarettes. She said she wanted to work, but no one could stand her. For this reason she had a room alone at the far end of the house. If you ever saw the movie "Throw Mama from the Train". Tina was Mama.

The first trouble I had was a few days after the home had started. Generally things had been going well. Everyone was in the house but Ted. I was working alone because we were not yet fully up to speed with staff. I was doing dishes when I noticed that the element in the bottom of the dishwasher was very hot, even though it wasn't on. I was in the process of assessing this problem when the phone rang.

Ted had been working at our shelter and the phone call was from the manager down there ( the

smoking lady ) telling me he was ready to be picked up. I said OK, and hung up, but now I had a dilemma. I reasoned that I should figure out what the story was with the dishwasher before getting Ted; I figured I had time. I went into the basement and tried to figure out where the circuit breaker was, but there were several different boxes in different parts of the basement and none of them were labeled. I fooled around with a few, but the case was hopeless.

I went back upstairs and looked into the dishwasher, the element was now glowing red. I had no choice but to call an electrician. I had no sooner called the electrician when the phone rang again, again, it was the shelter calling. They were closing for the day and needed Ted to leave. I explained my situation, and while the woman on the other end of the phone was unsympathetic she suggested that I call my boss. I hung up and called Mary. Mary was not immediately available so I had to leave a message. I went back to trying to figure out what to do with the dishwasher. By now it was smoking a little and I was quite worried.

Fortunately, the electrician came quickly. As I was showing him the problem, the phone rang again. It was Mary. The staff at the shelter had called to complain that I hadn't picked up Ted yet. I explained the problem with the dishwasher to Mary and she didn't even care. She said, "you're the Manager, you figure it out".

I didn't know what to do. I had to get Ted, but I couldn't leave the electrician alone, or could I? These folks were out on their own cognizance. They were free to come and go, so if I ran down to get Ted and was gone 10 minutes, what would be the harm? I asked the electrician how long he would be and he said he would be about 10 minutes or so. I said, "great". That was all the time I needed. I left everyone there with the electrician and took off. It was a bit of a gamble, but heck, I saw no choice.

I flew down to the shelter. When I got there Ted was waiting outside. On the way back he told me that everyone had left and left him there, outside to wait for me. Gggrrr, was I pissed! This would not be the last time I would get my balls in a vice this way.

Now, you might be thinking, this really sucks, and it did, but why did I not try to find another job? Well, I did. I tried really hard, but at the same time I had a full time job and was going to school part time and the economy stunk, so I wasn't going anywhere soon.

The days moved on and each one was an adventure, that's why I am writing this book. You never knew what was going to happen. One day Tina went to yell at me at the same time she was taking her medication. Tina took about 11 pills and she had a habit of taking them all at once. On this particular day her method failed her and she ended up choking. Real choking, not able to breath at all, unable to speak and turning blue. Luckily I was right there. I grabbed her and I spun her around hard, as I did so I wrapped my arms around her abdomen. I felt for her breastbone as I had been shown in First Aid and I made a fist, pulling upward and inward at the same time. At first nothing happened, except I pulled Tina partially off the ground. So, I kept thrusting. On the third try her pills popped out of her mouth and literally flew across the room. That Heimlich maneuver thing does work!

After that Tina was a lot nicer to me. She was still Tina and she always shouted, but we had a special bond between us.

My priority was to get some staff, as I was working 10 hour days, on a good day. Finally I got fully staffed, we had an interesting mix of people. There was the two brothers, Mario and Jose, they were nice guys, new to the field. They were both Puerto Rican and spoke Spanish, so this helped with Adam. Their cousin George worked third shift for me. I had finagled one of the newer staff from the apartment program to join me. I was able to do this because I convinced Mary would we need someone who knew a little bit at least about the field, so Dee joined us at the home. The last person to come on board was Connie. Connie had been a Certified Nurses Aid and had worked in the people biz, but this type of thing was new to her. Connie was in her mid-fifties, another kindly grandmotherly type. But she was feisty and I really liked her.

It was good to have staff, but with more staff came more problems. The new folks had never worked with people who have mental illness and this was a real crash course for them. There were other things to do to, for example the home needed maintenance. One day the cable TV went on the fritz. Well, you would have thought the place was on fire! Everyone was so upset. I called the cable TV repair service and they sent a man out. When he came a few days later, I met him outside. He wanted to find out where the cable came into the house. I walked with him around the outside of the house. When we found the cable wire we noticed right away something was amiss. A thin brown wire snaked down the wall and entered the cable TV cable via a splice in the cable. Clearly, it did not belong there. Intrigued, we followed the path of the thin wire up the side of the building and through an open window, right into the men's dorm!

We went inside and up to the dorm. I knocked and then walked right in with the cable guy in tow. John A was the only guy in there at the time, but had a bed off to one side. John was sprawled on his bed watching TV, *Cable TV*! John had spliced into the cable to get his own cable television service!

With seven people living in the house there was a lot to do. We had to do everything, including mow the lawn. I used to come in on Saturdays to mow, especially after Mary stopped by and was upset over the state of the lawn.

One day, I was mentioning to Jose about how I hated to have to come in and mow on Saturdays. Jose said, "Hey, I'll mow the lawn for you. If you show me how". I said, "show you how to what"? He said, "you know, like, mow. How to use the mower. I have never mowed a lawn before". Now I group up in suburbia and the idea that any healthy male could reach adulthood without having mowed at least a bazillion lawns was as foreign a concept to me as riding a camel. But I appreciated his spunk, so I made a program out of it and roused everyone, staff and clients alike, to come and look at the mower, while I gave a course in its use and safety features.

One day a new woman moved into the house to occupy the one remaining bed. Her name was Theresa. She was young and vaguely pear shaped with long curly blonde hair. She was very



nervous and she spoke in a halting way while she shifted her weight back and forth on her feet several times a minute. For the first few weeks she was the model client, compliant, doing her chores and such with little to no complaint. The one night staff took all of our clients to a dance.

The dance was peopled by folks like ours and by people from the “community”, mostly “street people”. Upon returning home from the dance John B and Ted both independently reported to Mario that they had seen Theresa take some “pills” from some one they did not know. Theresa had a lengthy history of attempted suicide, so anything like this had to be taken seriously. I asked Mario to assess her and he reported that she seemed fine.

I had never experienced anything like this and I did not know what to do. On the one hand the “pills” could have been Tic Tacs. On the other hand they could have been drugs. It was now getting on about 10pm, and staff would be leaving shift. I figured since I did not know what to do, I would stall for time by asking lots of questions, which I did. Eventually, I had Mario bring Theresa in and ask her point blank. She denied taking anything from anyone. This made me more nervous. According to Mario Theresa looked fine, but she could become sick later on. I reasoned that the worse case scenario if I did nothing would be that Theresa could die. On the other hand, if I acted proactively, the worse case scenario if I sent her to the ER was that she would be upset and I would waste everyone’s time. I opted for the outcome that did not involve any death. Mario took Theresa to the ER, where she was checked out and found to be fine. I will never forget this first significant management call I had to make.

One day Mary called me into the office and asked me why we were spending so much money on light bulbs. I told her that I wasn’t aware that we were spending a lot of money on light bulbs. For some reason Mary had got it into her head that Dee was taking good light bulbs from the group home and bringing them to her home and exchanging them for her burnt out ones. I said to Mary, “ah, yeah, OK, I will look into it”.

I began to pay attention and sure enough we were going through light bulbs like they were going out of style. I replaced one in a hallway one day and the next day it was burnt out! I became suspicious too, but it seemed like an extraordinary length to go to just for some light bulbs. Why take ones in use, when you could just steal them from the supply closet? I called an electrician to take a look at the wiring. Perhaps this was a short somewhere. The electrician came in and looked at the wiring and pronounced that our wiring was made in Canada, and while it was mostly the same as American wiring, you needed some sort of special bulb.

I went out and bought the special bulbs and viola, no more burnt out light bulb issue. This taught me a lot about leaping to conclusions.

After this however, I got wind of staff rumbling saying the house was haunted. Now, almost anyone who works in this field will tell you that their group home is haunted. There is a myth that people with disabilities attract spirits from the “other side”. Third shift staff began to talk about strange noises at night. Other staff began to talk about things going missing. Even the whole light bulb concern was seen as some sort of supernatural visitation. One night Jose called

me at home to say that he had lost his car keys. I thanked him for disturbing me at home at 9:30pm with this information and hung up.

A few days later the car keys reportedly, mysteriously reappeared.... Inside a closed and sealed box of cereal, according to Jose! I began to think that mental illness was contagious.

Of course, I did not put any stock in such things. Then one day, out of the blue, water began to leak from the ceiling. It was roughly below one of the upstairs bathroom. I thought that perhaps someone had taken a shower and flooded the bathroom, so I went to check it out, but the floor was dry.

The water was dripping pretty good, so I ended up having to call a plumber. The plumber came and cut a hole in the ceiling. At the time I was working in my office, when the plumber came in with a quizzical look on his face. I said "what's up?". He said, you should come and see this.

We both went over to where there was now a big hole in the ceiling. He handed me a flashlight and said "here, have a look". So I climbed up the ladder that was there and pointed it around inside the ceiling area.

I said, "What am I looking for?" He replied, "do you see where the wet areas are? "Hhmm, yes", I replied slowly looking around the area of the sheet rock just around the hole was wet, but no where else was wet, so I reported my observation to the plumber. "Right", he said, "that's the point. The water did not come running down the bay, the area formed by the two ceiling joists".

"It must have leaked from above" I said, but instantly realized that this was improbable, as this area was dry and showed no evidence of ever having been wet. "Well, it must have come from this pipe right here", I said, reaching up and grabbing a plastic pipe that ran across the bay.

The plumber said, "I thought that too, so I checked it out, and cut into the pipe. It's a vent pipe. It doesn't carry any water. It is as dry as a bone inside". I looked down, the plumber was holding a foot long section of the pipe and showing me the insides. I stepped down a rung and wiped the inside of the pipe with my finger, bringing out a little bit of dust.

"So, if the water did not come to this spot from somewhat else, and it didn't leak from above, and it didn't leak out of this pipe, where did it come from"?

The plumber looked down at the pipe for a moment, and then reached up to straighten out his hair. Finally he replied, "I don't know, I was hoping you might have an idea".

One day Mary called me. It seemed that a local landmark hotel was slated for destruction and the owners were selling everything. And I do mean everything, including the all the furniture of course, the rugs, even the elevators. A big auction was being held in one big tag sale. She asked me to organize a shopping trip to buy as much useful furniture as we could get. I was given the

resources of 2 vehicles and 6 men, 3 staff persons and 3 clients. Since the organization had only one appropriate vehicle for this purpose we had to rent a U-haul.

The day of the auction, the arrangements were made and I went to get the U-Haul. When I got to the rental place, I found that the vehicle they had for me was a piece of junk! It was certainly large enough, but almost nothing worked. There were no headlights, no horn and no instruments. I couldn't even tell how fast I was going. To top it off, it was a standard, and since I was the only one of the bunch who could drive a standard it was up to me to negotiate this rusting hulk through the narrow inner city streets. I saw disaster written all over this.

The clutch was really funky. It stuck up very far off the floor, so every time I had to shift I had to cock myself sideways, and lift my leg way up, just to push the clutch back down. Every time I did this I would grind the gears, because the clutch also had to travel all the way to the floor. After a short time, I didn't care about the gears.

I went back to the office to collect my team and to get the money. The sale was cash only. I had no idea how much stuff Mary wanted me to get, so I was surprised when she handed me \$3,000 dollars!

At the hotel it was chaos. There were hundreds of people there. None of the furniture we were interested in, beds, nightstands, dressers, ect was out on display. You had to go from room to room, find what you wanted and find its identification number. Then you had to go to the lobby and to the auctioneer, where you would register what you were willing to pay. This wasn't like the auctions you see on TV. There was not a lot of competition for the sorts of things we wanted because there was literally hundreds of each item.

In the end we purchased 12 beds, 6 dressers and something like 20 nightstands. In addition we had a smattering of lamps and other things.

Then we just had to pick it up. This entailed going around to the freight/delivery side of the hotel where hotel workers brought our stuff down in driblets and drabs. It was all very confusing, but we managed to get all of our purchases and get home safely, so I counted it as a success. It was also one of the more unique things I had done for the organization.

As with the apartments, some people stayed and some people left. Some people moved on to less restrictive settings ( like the apartments ) and some people ended up back in the hospital. Within a few weeks only Ted was left from the original group who first moved in. Sometimes the entire system made no sense to me. There were people living in apartments who needed more supervision, such as they could get at a group home, and people in the group home who did not need that level of support. I came to learn that resources were few and DMH stuck people wherever there was a slot sometimes.

Another thing that I couldn't understand was the reliance on medicine and how medicine was prescribed. Most often people would come to us from the hospital with a medication regime in place. But if you looked at their records, you would find that their meds had been changed just before their release. Wouldn't it make sense to get someone find out what works, get the person stabilized on medications and then release them? If they were so stable that they were ready for release, why were their meds being changed?

Part of my job involved taking people to their medication reviews. Most of the people at the group home went to day program, which is to say that they sat around all day and smoked, doing little else. When it was time to review meds, the psychiatrist ( usually someone from India ) would ask the client "so, how are you doing today". If they weren't doing well, meds were increased. If they said they were doing well ( even if they were not ), medications were kept the same. I had no say. No one ever asked me how the individual was doing. Time and again I would see someone totally out of his or her mind with hallucinations go to "group" and tell the Dr. all was fine. And they looked fine. As soon as they left they had a melt down and were back to drooling and talking to themselves again. In this way the Dr. went through each person one by one. When they were done they would go outside and smoke, leaving me with a big fat sheath of fresh prescriptions.

One day Adam went off. He didn't speak English and I did not speak much Spanish, but I tried to figure out what was wrong. He was pretty upset, so I called one of my Spanish speaking staff and gave Adam the phone. He promptly smashed it on the floor. He ran at me, and I thought he was going to strike me, but he just ran past me tearing off his clothes. He ran outside. By the time I knew it, he was down the road, nearly naked. I was alone on shift and there was no way I was going to catch him so I had to call the police. I never did find out what set him off.

In their infinite wisdom Fairview Hospital decided that Daryl could again be discharged, and since we now had an empty bed, Rose House was looking like the perfect place for him. Daryl moved in rather quickly.

His behavior had not abated. I had to put a lock on the refrigerator because he could literally eat an entire two-pound package of cold cuts in two bites, and drink a gallon of milk in one long swallow. He was a handful, a force of nature.

One day I got a phone call, it was our neighbor across the street. Evidently Daryl was in their garden stark naked. They had called the police too, but after I got Daryl back in the house and the police got a chance to meet Daryl and see the group home, they thought it best to leave him in my care.

Daryl's piece-de-résistance was yet to come. One of the employees one evening had their son stop by to bring them some dinner. Unfortunately, this person had no idea about what to do and not do around people with serious mental illness. He left his car running and the doors unlocked. While the son was inside, Daryl was outside. Daryl got into the car, put it in drive and drove the car through the closed garage door. Several thousands of dollars worth of damage was caused.

Despite Daryl's antics, he was not our most challenging individual. Paul was.

Paul was in his early twenties. He had mental illness, and also had had a serious substance abuse problem as a teenager. One day, while his father was driving Paul back to the psychiatric hospital ( Paul evidently had a pass to visit his family for the day ) Paul opened the car door and jumped out as his father was doing a steady 60 mph. Unfortunately for Paul, the human head is quite massive and when you fall, you have a tendency to lead with your head, so Paul's head impacted the highway pretty good. It really scrambled his egg.

So now in addition to everything else, Paul had a traumatic brain injury. He had a difficult time thinking linearly, putting words together and generally making sense out of things. He forgot something as soon as you told him and he often repeated himself over and over and over. Paul also had what was called anomia, meaning that he forgot the names of things. So instead of saying "refrigerator", he would have to say something like, "you know that big box in the kitchen that's cold inside".

It wasn't these things that made him challenging. He could simply be a pain in the ass. Paul wanted to be a rock star, though he couldn't play guitar or any other instrument, but he wanted to try. He had an electric guitar which was broken and on which he could not keep a set of strings because he kept doing Pete Townsend style strums. Paul was not about to go to school, or doing anything else productive during the day, not when his rock star destiny awaited.

One day I was driving the van with almost everyone on it and Paul decided he was going to smoke. I told Paul that there was no smoking on the van. Paul said "fuck you, I can do whatever I want", and proceeded to light up. Now at about this point I had had enough of Paul, because this was not new. I recalled that even though someone was in the group home they were supposed to be safe to be in the community and that they were there voluntarily. So I said to Paul, one more time that he could not smoke on the van. This time he didn't say anything, but just blew smoke in my direction.

I stopped the van and told Paul "off". He said "what?" I said "get off the van". "You cant do that", he complained looking now slightly worried that I could. I said, "yes, I can, and I am. Now get off the van or I will call the police". He opened the door, but said, "how am I going to get home". I replied, (of course) "walk". "Now out". He complied and I drove off. I saw him in the mirror there receding in the distance. He didn't move, but he just stood there smoking. Somehow he managed to take the bus home.

Perhaps this gave him a sense of confidence because a few days later, Paul eloped from his day program. He went downtown and paid a visit to a car dealership that happened to have a bright red Corvette on display. I don't know how he managed, but according to Paul ( I did call to verify his story, I just had to ), he talked the salesman into letting him take it for a spin. I didn't even know that Paul could drive, but he showed me a license, and it was still valid. Paul had a lot of

things going against him, but he could be a smart guy when he wanted to be.

Paul was in many ways stuck at 16 years old. When the weather warmed up, he wanted to camp outside in the yard. He had a tent that his parents brought him and not seeing how this could cause trouble, I allowed him to camp in the backyard.

One night when he was camping back there, Dee went out to get him for medications. It was summer and it was still light out at 8pm. Dee told me that when she approached the tent she could see Paul inside with the cat. At first, Dee said she just he was petting the cat, but then realized that Paul's penis was out. According to Dee, she stumbled upon Paul having sex (or at least trying to ) have sex with the cat.

Now this has to be one of the most fucked up things I have ever been presented to deal with. Dee is up in arms, and soon the other staff are too. Paul had been a real pain in the ass, and the staff wanted him gone. Now, I didn't see this with my own eyes. As a manager, you have to look at things with the perspective it might be true, and with a perspective that it might not be true. Between thinking that Paul was having sex with the cat, and thinking that Dee made this story up to get rid of Paul, the simpler story is that Dee made this up. However, I still had to act.

A meeting was held with Paul's team and all of Paul's problems.

## **THE FALL OF MARY**

Since I had been working at the group home I was somewhat out of touch with what was going on with the rest of the organization. Oh, I still saw and spoke with Mary often and occasionally visited her office for meetings, but I wasn't there to see what was going on for myself. So I was somewhat out of the loop. I was OK with this because I was glad to not be involved with the "big move", I had already moved enough furniture for one life time, and even happier to be out of Mary's shadow. Days would go by where I would never see or hear from her.

Mary had hired a woman named Wendy as her "assistant". Wendy had an impressive resume, had gone to a prestigious school and was clearly a go-getter. She did not know what she was in for. Wendy liked to make it known that she was Mary's right hand person, and that she was hand selected to be some type of new manager over the rest of us. Mary never really confirmed this, but she did not deny it either, and it was unclear exactly what Wendy's job was to be. I have to admit that I was a little jealous, not that I wanted to be that close to Mary, but if anyone was going to be groomed for promotion, it should have been me, given everything else that I had done and gone through. Add this to the fact that I felt removed from what was going on with the larger organization as Manager of the group home, and I had my nose a little out of joint.

Then one late afternoon I received a phone call from Paul, Mary's boss. Paul asked me to meet him for dinner at a downtown restaurant and that he had something very important to discuss

with me. I did not know what to make of this, as I did not know Paul very well. It was unprecedented for him to call me, and even more so to invite me for dinner. Something was up, something big. Of course I accepted his invitation.

Paul gave me directions to a small out of the way place. It was the sort of place where mafia dons would go to eat... and get wacked. Inside, Paul was there with father Casta. They were sitting at a corner table. There was hardly anyone else in there.

At first our conversation was all pleasantries; innocuous chitchat about the weather and such, and discussion of what was good to eat there. After we had ordered, Paul turned toward me and I could see that his mood had changed. He had a penetrating and sober look in his eye. He said, "I'm going to get straight to the point, but I don't want what we talk about here to leave this room, not yet, anyway. Understand?". I thought any minute a gang of mafia types would come in with Tommy guns ablazin and blow me away for some unknown transgression against the "family".

But Paul was true to his word. He said, "We very recently discovered some disturbing information about Mary and she was fired earlier today".

I just about jumped out of my seat, hitting the table, and thereby upsetting my water glass, which then splashed all over the table. I was not embarrassed. I was far too shocked to be. On the way to the restaurant, I had imagined all sorts of possible scenarios as to why Paul had asked me for dinner, but this was not one of them. "What?!", was all I could honestly manage to say. I could barely breath.

Paul continued, "Father Casta knows a lot of people", Paul gave Father a look, but Father remained quiet. "Not too long ago, Father was at a meeting where he met a young professional man. They struck up a conversation and soon realized that they were from the same part of the world. Naturally, the conversation turned to, do you know such and such? It turns out that this man was Mary's son!

Again the word "What!?" exploded from my mouth, as I again hit the table and again caused a minor flood with what was left of my water.

Paul acted like nothing had happened and he continued in low, conspirational tones, with an occasional look to Father Casta and around the room.

"Mary never told us she had children. In fact, she denied it. There was no need to lie. So when we learned about this, we began to wonder what else Mary had lied about. We then went back and began to check her references, which I am ashamed to say had never been done. Mary had told us that she was an RN, and that also turned out to not be true.

I managed to not spill anything this time.

Paul then commenced asking me a bunch of questions regarding Mary. Had I ever seen her do anything unusual ( mean, yes, nothing I would define as unusual, not for her )? What did DMH think of her? Paul was especially interested in the theft, intimating that Mary staged the theft herself. And other questions along these lines. But the shocks were not yet done for me.

After my “interrogation”, Paul told me that he wanted ME to be Acting Executive Director, while they searched for a new one. I fell out of my chair by melting and sliding under the table. The few people in the room were now looking at me. They had just made me an offer I just *COULD* not refuse!

In most situations the loss of such a senior person would have been a crisis all until itself. However, not only were we missing our fearless leader, we were also on the cusp of a big move. We had over 30 people to move with all their belongings, the furniture, as well as our offices and the like; the same things we had just spent the last two years putting in place. I couldn’t imagine pulling all this off.

Another concern, one which Paul had confided in me, was that DMH was not happy with our performance. It seems that they had given us a lot more money for staff than we had used. Mary had run things with a skeleton crew and each year ending up with a big surplus. Since the organization was a non-profit, we could not keep our surplus, we had to give it back to DMH. Paul seemed to think that Mary had done this on purpose, in order to curry favor in their eyes. However, this hadn’t worked, DMH was concerned that we did not have enough staff to run the organization properly.

So, in order to put this crisis in its proper context, let me outline the problems that faced me as the new Acting Executive Director:

- 1) We had to move more than 30 people and the contents of all their apartments.
- 2) We had to find somewhere to go with 30 people and the contents of all their apartments.
- 3) We had to hire more staff
- 4) We had to hire a new Executive Director
- 5) While this was going on, we were still developing new programs.

## **THE MOVE**

Fortunately, Paul turned out to be a real nice guy. He helped me a lot. In addition, I didn’t have to worry about finding a place to go, it seemed that Paul and Father Casta had a line on a place.

One of the members of the Board of Directors was a guy named Duane. Duane was an up and coming real estate agent who I think fancied himself too much to be the next Donald Trump. He was young, rich, and ambitious and the women probably thought he was handsome. He was Father Casta’s friend and he was also, like Father Casta, politically well connected. Duane quickly became a major player in our life at the mental health programs.



Duane owned a series of small apartment buildings right downtown. There were 4 apartment buildings and another small office building in a small compound like area. All together there was about 40 apartments. In between there was a large open parking lot, which these apartments buildings all bordered, so it was sort of like a small island unto itself. Which was good, because it was smack dab in one of the worst areas in the city.

Duane was excited about the prospect of our moving in, because up until now the places had all been crack dens and the like. He had evicted everyone that lived there and was counting on our steady income to help he redevelop the property into something more respectable.

The first time I visited the place, I was impressed. It didn't look half bad, as Duane had already begun to clean it all up. The property itself was quite serviceable the problem would become the neighborhood in which we were situated.

Pat, one of the staff at the group home had a son that was just trying to get his own furniture moving business off the ground. Paul and I met with him, and since his mother knew us and since he was hungry for the work, he gave us a great price on moving everyone.

We had to meet with all of the clients and tell them the game plan. Each client was supposed to pack up their own belongings and label them. Regarding the furniture, we went around with a roll of masking tape and labeled each piece with the number of the apartment into which it was going. There were lots of concerns with who should go where sorts of things, but we did not have much time to screw around. The moving deadline loomed.

From that point forward everything became to move at warp speed. I was working 60, 70 and even 80 hours per week, every week. This time period in my life was just a blur. Behind everything we had to retain the confidence of DMH as they were more than a little concerned. The local Commissioner had implied, in a less than subtle way, that our funding was on the line.

I had to prioritize, and with Paul and Duane handling the transition from one place to another, I concentrated in hiring people. For the first few weeks, I had been literally working out of the trunk of my car. I had set up a portable office because I was shuttling back and forth between the group home where I was still the Manager, the old apartments and the new apartments. In order to ease the transition, we decided that we would move one of our offices to the new place so that we had a presence there.

I had gone down to my new office and was in the process of setting it up. It was really a cool little office. It was sort of like a green house, with glass all round, and it jutted off the side of the main building. As I was in putting together my desk, Wendy came in. She looked around at me and said, "so, how do you like *my* job"? and she said it with the most icy and demeaning tone she could muster. I said "so far, so good", and she turned around and left. She quit within the week.

Setting up the office there was a good move because it gave me a place to do interviewing and

while with Wendy's resignation we were kinda going backwards, I was moving quickly to hire new staff. I didn't really know much about budgets so Paul sat down with me and we went over our financial picture to figure out how many employs we could hire. Almost over night our little band went from 7 people including myself to nearly twenty. We hired counselors, a maintenance guy and a receptionist.

I had advertised for a maintenance person and got a lot of applicants. I thought I would be efficient and interview everyone all on the same day, every hour on the hour. There was no end of applicants, so I had a full day of interviewing. Unfortunately, the guy I liked was one of the first people I interviewed, but since I hadn't taken any notes, I couldn't remember who it was!

The big day came. We decided we were going to do a big push and get all the move done at once. The vans came early in the morning and we began moving stuff. Staff were moving things in their cars too, and we had a few scrounged about vans. Having moved some of the office helped. It also helped that our clients did not have much in the way of personal effects. It was still probably the longest day of my life.

When nightfall came, there was still a lot of moving to be done. The owner of the moving company came to see me and say they were knocking off for the day. I was incredulous as there was still much to be done. However, he said it was a safety concern and a liability for him to be working his crew in the dark ( what about our safety, the safety of my crew? ), and they had to knock off. There was nothing I could do to change his mind regardless of how mad I got. He promised to be back by morning. We couldn't stop thought because we had people and belongings now stretched between two places and not enough staff to cover them both, plus some people would be sleeping in empty apartments so we had to keep going.

We worked well into the night. My staff were great, pitching in, staying with me and working beside me. By about 1am, most things had been moved. Only things of no real consequence remained behind.

The next few weeks were extremely hectic and I put in many 12+ hour days. My first indication how different it was going to be down town came the very next day we were there. I was walking the buildings early one morning, ensuring that people were where they were supposed to be, everyone had furniture and their belongings, and that all of our keys worked, when I came upon someone sleeping in the hallway.

The person laying there was a man probably in his fifties. He was wearing multiple layers of clothing and he was filthy with long stringy brown hair. Newspapers protruded from various pockets and tears in his clothing. He was sleeping soundly. This individual was clearly intoxicated and despite my speaking to them and then shaking them they were unarousable. I resorted to kicking him, well pushing him really, with the toe of my shoe. Slowly he woke up. He looked up at me, but I could tell he couldn't focus. He got up without saying a word, staggering and holding on to the wall. He walked out the nearest door and left without as much as turning around. I followed him with my eyes to ensure he left the premises. This activity became part of

my regular morning ritual from that day forward.

In another building, while still doing my rounds, I found that some had used a back stairway landing as a toilet. One of the biggest piles of shit I have ever seen was left unceremoniously in the middle of the hall. We had to keep every door locked at all times, but even this did not deter the phantom dumpers.

Other contacts with the natives involved my daily running of the prostitute gauntlet. There were about 3 or 4 regulars who were walking up and down the street near our compound almost anytime day or night. Every time I went to work, and every time I left, one or more of them would shout to me to see if I was looking for a “party”. I wouldn’t have had sex with these women ( if they were women ), even if I could have used someone else’s penis and a whole body condom. I couldn’t believe how blatant they were.

Despite these patches of local color we began to settle in pretty well. We had a full compliment of staff and we were back in business. Paul seemed pleased with my work. I routinely went to meeting with DMH bigwigs and was clearly the go-to guy for the agency. DMH seemed pleased with the progress we had made, and they had stopped breathing down our necks for awhile. They were not too happy that all of our apartments were clustered however because they were concerned we were becoming a mini-institution.

We promised to make efforts to break up the clustered sites. Thus, this became my next big task, to find property for our new day program and to find apartments around the city for what became called our “scattered sites” apartments. In the meantime we were open for business and started taking referrals for new clients.

One of the biggest improvements Paul and I had made was to hire a bookkeeper. In the past, Mary had done this on her own, but we have seen what a fiasco that had become. We needed someone who could handle the money. We ended up hiring this woman named Pat. She had a lot experience, and was familiar with, and also sympathetic to, the kind of work we were doing. Pat took a little warming up to because on the surface she was a somewhat grouchy and crotchety woman in her late 60’s. But she new her stuff and despite her gruff exterior, after a few months of working together she and I became quite a good team, though everyone else, even Paul, was put off by her demeanor.

I think she liked me because I did no have any pretenses. She knew money and I didn’t, so I tried to learn form her as much as I could. For my part, I didn’t let her get to me, and when she saw that I was un-intimidated by her approach, she warmed up to me. However, the honeymoon with Duane was much more short-lived. Pat was gruff on the outside, but nice on the inside. Duane was charming on the outside, but a snake inside.

Paul had taken me under his wing, and was treating me like he was my uncle or something. He met with me regularly and he took me with him to important meetings, and encouraged me to have regular meetings on my own with DMH. I have to say, that I was enjoying this new position and the attention I was getting. It was very hard work, and I out in many long days, but I was also getting a free education, literally a crash course, in management. Some of Paul's lessons were quite humorous. He would often walk by me and drop little pearls of wisdom on me. Like the one time when I was sitting at my desk and I had just finished meeting with someone, Paul walked by and said, "your chair is too low". I said, "pardon"?, not quite having heard him or understood what he said if I did hear him correctly.

Paul repeated himself. "Your seat, its too low". He said, "your in charge, you have to convey a presence and authority. You need to sit higher than those who are sitting in front of you". And then he proceeded to come into the office and help me adjust the chair. Part of what made it funny to me is that Paul was about 5'6" tall.

Another one of his "Paulisms" came when he and I were in the process of setting up a meeting with DMH. He asked me "how many DMH people are coming to this meeting?" I said, "3or 4, I think. Why?"

“We’ll have to get one or two more people on our side to join us”, Paul replied. “We cant have the enemy having more people than we do around the table”. I am sure he meant “enemy” in a joking way, but I took him more seriously when the day of the meeting came. We had invited two more of our people to join us, so that it would be four and four, four of us and four employees from DMH. When we got to the meeting however ( it was on their “turf” ), there were 5 of them.

Trouble began the day that Father Jim moved in. Since we were not occupying all of the, Duane was concerned that he was taking a financial hit. He let out some of the space to Father Jim he was some sort of catholic missionary working with inner city people who had AIDs. There were a few apartments for his clients, an apartment he occupied and a “chapel” that Father Jim had set up, complete with kneelers, alter and cross.

Unfortunately, and unknown to Father Jim, Patrick was living just above his chapel.

Patrick was in his 70’s and had spent most if his life in mental hospitals. He was short and wiry, with a lot of energy for a man his age. He was, in the vernacular of the street, “crazier than a shit house rat”.

Patrick never slept. He smoked all night and liked to move his furniture around quite a bit. He also entertained “guests”, usually street people, with whom he would play cards and take their money. He smoked a pipe and used the floor as his personal ashtray. The rug was ruined within days of his moving in.

Patrick also had an issue with the toilet. Actually, it wasn’t just Patrick, I came to learn, that for whatever reason, people with mental illness had toilet problems. Most of the time this took the shape of their using way, way too much toilet paper, and thus clogging the toilet. Naturally, this caused it to overflow, and since these folks were not so concerned with such things, this resulted in heavy flows of water rushing in a lively fashion throughout apartments and from the third floor, to the second and, in turn, to the first. Patrick overflowed his toilet almost daily, and this is where Father Jim came in.

Father Jims chapel was below Patrick as I said, and it seemed that Father Jim took great offense to dirty toilet water raining on his alter. It is safe to say that Father Jim had absolutely no sense of humor about this. Under most circumstances, I would sympathize with Father Jim, except that Father Jim was an ass.

You would think that there would be some kind of kinship between Father Jim because of the nature of the work we were doing, but there wasn’t. We didn’t know anything about him until he moved in. He never came over to introduce himself, and when I went to introduce myself, I received a cold reception. It wasn’t long before Patrick’s toilet overflowed and made us forever antagonists.

The first time we had the toilet deluge, Father Jim came by the main program office ( my office along with the other administrative offices was in a different building), in a rage. He blasted my staff, using words I am sure that priests are not supposed to use. They didn't even have a chance to get a word in edge wise. It was a once sided tirade.

Afterwards, Father Jim called Duane, who called Father Casta, who called Paul, who called me. A complaint pipeline. I understood the problem, but was at a bit of a loss as to what to do about it. We tried showing Patrick how to use his toilet properly, but to no avail. I wasn't sure he wasn't doing it on purpose. It continued to happen. After the first time, Father Jim never spoke with us again, and leveled any complaints he had about us with Duane. This was probably for the best, but it made for an awkward situation, and widened a growing gap in the relationship between Duane and us. Eventually, Father Jim moved out as a result of the problem. Not before I had moved Patrick, however, to another apartment. He continued to overflow his toilet, but it was no longer soiling Father Jims alter.

As this problem continued, and other residents demonstrated a capacity to have the same sort of difficulty, Duane became increasingly concerned, and rightfully so. Much damage was ensuing. This resulted in many long discussions about how to curb the problem. The damage wasn't strictly confined to toilet floods, oh, no, there were a number of other problems, and Duane took it upon himself to inspect and assess the breadth and depth of the client's apartments. He even went door to door, knocked and got himself invited in, and what he saw concerned him.

Most of the clients smoked, and none of them believed in ashtrays very much. One woman's rug in particular, was nothing but one giant burn mark. It looked like the surface of the moon. In other apartments, some clients had taken knives, or other pointy objects and poked holes in the walls. Duane compiled a list of grievances and hardly any apartment was spared his concern. Very few of the apartments had things like curtains or pictures on the walls, which then increased their look of desolation and destruction, even if there wasn't so much.

I was at a loss. Not only was Duane concerned, which then made both Father Casta and Paul concerned, but DMH was also getting concerned. I could see their concern, but wasn't sure what to do about it. Our staffing ration was such that we could not spend much 1:1 time with each individual. The folks were supposed to have some skills and be able to take care of their own basic needs, but clearly, there were many that could not. My staff were equally stumped. We tired all sorts of things, from awards for the nicest apartment, to fining people if their apartments were messy, to directly helping those individuals who were the worst cases.

The staff and I had raging philosophical debates about the virtues and values of a clean home. These apartments were our clients homes, they had a certain right to live the way that wanted to, and we couldn't go about impressing our values upon them, and most of the individuals didn't seem to care. However, if it came down to health and safety issues we would have to act.

In the meantime, we had other challenges, including dealing with the neighborhood. One of the clients had been stabbed in the arm by someone who was just running down the street. They ran by the individual, stuck them with a needle and then ran off. We had to have him tested for the next few months for communicable diseases and we were concerned about AIDs. Some of our clients had had their apartments broken into and now were liberated of their televisions. The staff were quite nervous too. At one staff meeting the staff were so concerned that ideas such as giving them bullet proof vests, walkie talkies, and even guns came up. Thank god, cooler heads prevailed and the idea about the guns was dropped.

Staff meetings were always riotous. There was always some disagreement or argument. The staff were all quite impassioned and it did not take too much for them to get up in arms about something. I was always nervous if we had guests at the meetings, because I was never sure how the staff were going to behave. They were a good bunch, but rough around the edges. Most did not have any formal training.

Most of the arguments came back to philosophical debates. What was it that we were doing? Keeping the clients out of the hospital? Giving them a better quality of life? Keeping them out of the hospital as long as possible? Keeping society safe? All of the above?

Our relationship with Duane continued to become strained. He blamed us for Father Jims departure, and he had lost that income, not to mention the costs he was experiencing for fixing things up. He and Paul came up with a plan to create the “Cherry Street” association, an organization that was an offshoot of the St. Andrews Society, which would allow the funds we paid for rent to go this organization and then back into Duanes pocket. I wasn’t exactly sure how it worked, and I wasn’t exactly sure if it was legal, as it sounded shady at best, but at the same time I confess my ignorance to the legal side of all this stuff, and reasoned that Paul and Duane knew what they were doing.

Duane had a big party every year, and I was honored to be invited. It was a fancy black time type of affair, and anyone who was anyone would be there, so I had to go out and get me some new duds. I was nervous about this, because I was way out of my league, but glad that Paul would be there and some of the other folks from the Organization, and my wife was invited too.

When I got there I was impressed. Duane had arranged for off-duty Watertown cops to serve as valets ( Duanes Father was a captain on the police force ), and there were big black cars parked everywhere. It was funny to get out of my hunk of junk all dressed up and let a valet park it for me. Duanes office, always very nice looking, was all decked, out. He had hired a piano player, as well as florists and caterers. Big sprays of flowers were set strategically around the room. The office used to be someone’s mansion, so the rooms were all decorated anyway with that velvet like wall paper in paisley on the walls. The main lobby had a huge chandelier and each room had a smaller version. One room was all gold and another all pink.

There were wait staff circulating around the room with such delicacies as rattlesnake, and there were self serve station for big rounds of venison, caviar and chocolate covered ants. I tried one of the ants, a little snake and passed on everything else.

There was also an open bar, and most people were three sheets to the wind, or on their way, but no one as much as Paul's wife, who could barely stand and couldn't form complete sentences. She was so blotto, that we ended up taking her upstairs to another office to let her sober up. Lynn and I agreed to baby-sit her, and we sat a good chunk of the night looking out at an expansive, and expensive, view of Watertown that this building commanded.

I have been to few parties as posh as this. There were dignitaries and minor local celebrities there, including the ex-mayor ( who had been brought up on corruption charges, but was never convicted ). He owned a funeral home and looked like he could have been one of his own clients. The current mayor was there too ( who was to later be brought up on corruption charges, and ended up going to the federal pokey for a few years ). There was even a man there that would later become governor of the state ( who would also be brought up on corruption charges years later and eventually serve jail time ) .

Despite the after hours good times, tensions were on the rise with Duane. Duane had two Doberman pinschers for security purposes. At night, they had free run of his fenced compound, during the day he had them in a kennel on his property. As the weather began to turn cold however, he needed to bring them inside, so he set up a kennel in the basement of the building where our offices were, right below us! At first it wasn't a problem, but after awhile the dogs began to bark down there, and of course, they had to poop, and since they were kenneled all day, they did their business in the basement, the smell of which began to waft up into our offices. We all believed that Duane had done this on purpose, so we complained through proper channels. After several complaints Duane made other arrangements to kennel the dogs.

The incident with the dogs demonstrates the depths to which Duane could sink and the subtleties that he could employ to harass you when you were his enemy. I heard through the grapevine that Duane spent a lot of time dealing with rental properties and evicting people, it was sort of his specialty, his niche. Even his own secretary told me that she couldn't stand him ( I ended up talking to her a lot, when I was trying to reach Duane ). She told me that she fully expected to come to work one day and find Duane shot dead behind his desk. She went on to say, that if that happened, she would go about her work for a few hours before notifying the authorities, just to make sure that he *was* dead.

Fate has a way of catching up with you though. Duane had several nice cars. One day there was a fierce thunderstorm with high winds that caused a very large tree to fall on his brand new Jaguar. Pity. I had also heard that Duane had an expensive boat, and that on its maiden voyage he hit some underwater rock at high speed, which caused major damage to the boat; it was totaled.



While I was Paul's, if not Duane's "Golden Boy", it could not last for long. I lacked the background to be a serious candidate for the position of Executive Director. While Paul thought I could handle it, DMH would not hear of it. I can't say that I blame them, I was lacking in experience. So we had to hire a new Exec.

After a thorough recruiting and hiring process we hired Margaret. Margaret was a diminutive Chinese lady from Canada ( of all places ). Her stature did not reflect her spirit though. She was sharp with a quick wit, and a solid background in both psychology and business. She had two masters degrees and had been a hospital administrator. Perfect.

Margaret set up a bunch of internal processes, like regular 1 on 1 meetings with the staff who reported directly to her, and something called the "steering committee", which met bi-weekly and was comprised of the senior staff. I was glad to have someone else responsible for the things I had been doing. The only problem was that I wasn't sure what my role was to be in the new organization. Margaret was somewhat walking a tightrope with me. She wanted to show me respect for my position, and not step on my toes, while at the same time demonstrate that she was in charge.

One of my first tasks was to hire a clinical specialist. We had lost Steve, and we needed a new clinician. Margaret did not want to contract out the function, as we did with Steve, but to actually have someone on staff. I assembled a panel to do interviews, wrote the ad, and began prioritizing candidates.

One of the candidates stood out head and shoulders above the rest. We were excited to have such a strong candidate. His name was Greg. Greg was somewhere in his 50's, with gray hair and a few extra pounds or two. He had a masters degree and a lifetime of experience. The entire interviewing panel was unanimous in our belief that he was the guy for the job. Margaret interviewed him and after a little negotiation, he was on board.

It looked as if we were finally starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel. We had an Executive Director, clinical staff and administrative personnel. In a word we were fully staffed. Despite our problems with Duane, things were going well and we were now stable for the first time in many months. True to form, this could not continue for long.

Margaret, despite being up there a bit in years, announced she was pregnant. She worked right up until her due date, but then was out for about 6 months. During this time I was Acting as Executive Director. I still had Paul for support and if I had questions, I could also call Margaret at home. The agency let her take so much time off because they wanted her to return. She had also somehow finagled herself a company car, which she had for the entire time she was out. It seemed like a good deal to me. Start a new job, get a company car, and then get pregnant and be out of work for ½ a year. When Margaret did return from her maternity leave, she announced that she and her husband were moving back to Canada. So much for giving her perks to ensure she returned. So much for stability.

The problems continued to escalate. Father Casta and Duane had had a falling out as friends. So the rift went right up the organization. Duane, who used to be on the Board of Directors resigned. One day I saw Duane in the parking lot and I approached him hoping to discuss some property management issues with him, and he was extremely rude to me, using many expletives, which I shall not repeat here. Paul and I began plans to move, yet again. We had only been in this location for about a year.

I was psyched to move, because I hated the location, but it is not easy to find a place for 40 people to live. I became very familiar with real estate. My new number one priority was to find “scattered site” apartments. DMH had never been happy with us having all of our apartments in a clustered setting. We could now, in all sincerity, tell them that we were going to move. We did not explain the problems we were having with Duane.

Several apartments were identified. There was an over abundance of apartments in the city, but few that I would live in, which was my rule of thumb. If I wouldn’t live there I wouldn’t recommend it to any of our clients. In a few weeks, I had lined up 4 apartments, and working with DMH case management we had identified people to live in them. They were called “scattered site” apartments because they were all over the city. The folks who would live here would have to be very high functioning, as it was almost full independence. So we now had a day program that we ran to help people from the hospital transition back to the community, we had Rose House, We had Steppingstones, we had scattered sites, and we had cornerstone. We were now providing services to nearly 60 people, with a budget of about 1.5 million dollars.

Despite a fairly sizeable budget, we had, like many businesses, cash flow problems. After the first of the new fiscal period – July 1 – we had very little money to operate on. This was because we were a non-profit and at the end of the year, we were only allowed to have so much money on hand. If we had too much, then we had to give it back, as had happened with Mary. But we had to make sure we had enough to pay our bills too.

Sometimes the check would be delayed coming from the state, and things would get tight. Any number of things could hold up their paying us. For some reason it was at this time that we did not get our check. In fact we didn’t get it until October. We had to operate for nearly four months with no income. Paul and I had to go around to various banks in an attempt to secure loans, so that we could make payroll. Of course only Paul, Pat and I new this. When the check finally came, I nearly jumped for joy. I opened up the envelope to reveal a check for \$750,000. I had never held a check in my hand for so much money before. It was exhilarating.

DMR continued to send us challenging people. We had one gentleman that had traumatic brain injury. At one time her had been a person without serious mental illness. However, he was a drunkard, and one time when drunk he fell down a flight of concrete steps and really bruised his melon. Unfortunately, he continued his drinking habits after his recovery. He was a really nice guy, when he was sober, but a mean drunk. He got drunk daily. Because of his TBI, he couldn’t remember anything you told him and he ended up asking you the same questions over and over.

He also missed going to work and his appointments. We tried to help him with calendars and a log book for himself to keep, but it didn't work. I think things were made worse by his alcoholism. We took him to AA meetings, but it wasn't helping. Every night he came home drunk. Often staff would find him sleeping in the bushes. When he was awakened he was mean and snarly. We didn't know what to do, so at our wits end, we began calling the cops every time he was like this. He was arrested daily. After a few weeks DMH found another program for him. I don't know where he went but if I know DMH they shoved him in his own apartment somewhere so he could drink to his heart's content.

Because of situations like this, and because of the unsavory characters in the neighborhood, we called the police a lot. DMH began to be concerned at the level of police calls. They asked Paul and I to come to their main office and explain why. I told them why. I told them about our drunk individual, and about the nature of the people in the area, they knew this, they were aware of this ( some DMH personnel were afraid to come to our place ), but they couldn't seem to grasp it. At the end of the meeting they were still wondering why we called the police so often. Hello, we are working in a giant crack den, what not to understand? Seeing that we were not getting anywhere, we promised to not call the police so often, and with our drunk gone, it was easy to stick to our word.

One night one of our staff was preparing to go home at 11pm. It was a cold night, so he pulled his car up to the office and let it idle to warm up. Mistake. He waited inside and gave report to the staff person who came in to relieve him. As they stood there talking, someone car jacked his car. Not thinking my staff, Don, ran out and jumped on the hood of his car. The assailant sped up and gave Don a ride down the street. Don hung on. The driver lost control of the car as he attempted to negotiate a corner and he crashed into a telephone pole. Don was dislodged and thrown off the hood. He quickly recovered. The driver jumped out of the vehicle and began to run. Don gave chase, and chased the guy through several yards, before Don gave up. The area could be a battle zone.

Part of what we were constantly doing was assessing what level of support people needed. People from the group home would move to the apartments, and people who lived in the apartments would move to scattered sites. People could also move backwards. DMH was famous for referring someone to a program simply because there was a vacancy, and upon assessment we found that they lacked the skills to live in a less supervised setting.

One person who appeared to be misplaced was Willie. Willie was in his late twenties, tall and thin, he was clean cut and looked like any college kid. At first blush, there appeared to be nothing wrong with Willie. Once you got to know him however, you could tell that, there was something...odd. He would talk to himself and smile a lot when you were not looking. He always acted like he had secrets he just wasn't telling you. Despite these things, Willie could do a lot for himself, so we helped him get into scattered sites. Willie wanted to live alone, and since he qualified for city assistance, we hooked him up with city housing. In a few months, we had Willie nicely situated in a modern housing tower. We never suspected that would be a bad thing.

The apartment that Will lived in was mostly senior housing, and because Willie was young and fit they put him on the very top floor of the high rise. He had a great view of the city. He was on the 17th floor or something like that. All was well for the first few weeks, then one morning, apparently after a night of heavy drinking, and calling 1-900 numbers, Willie jumped out of his apartment window and plummeted to his death. It was a beautiful Sunday morning and the sight of Willie's grizzly demise occurred right in front of a parish of good god-fearing people on their way to church that fine day.

After the police had investigated ( a very hasty investigation I may add, especially for an untimely death ). We were allowed to enter Willie's apartment and collect some of his things. I did not want to go alone, so I press ganged a couple of staff to come with me. When we got there, there was still police tape on the door. Inside the apartment was nearly bare. None of the things that he had bought, or had been given him, were in evidence. Empty beer cans littered the floor and the tables. An ashtray overflowed with cigarette butts. On a scratch pad by the phone were a dozen or so 1-900 phone numbers. Porn lines. We later found out that the night before he died Willie racked up something like 900 dollars in calling 1-900 numbers.

The screen on the window was broken where Willie jumped. The police had told me that they think Willie opened the window, and then with a running start across his living room, launched himself through the screen. No one suspected that Willie would do such a thing. In looking back I can only surmise that alcohol, loneliness and an intense desire to escape the demons that plagued him.

We had many people die, not all so dramatic. Roy was a guy that everyone liked. He was in his 60's, and was about as easy going as you can get. He was short and plump, and always smiled, but rarely spoke, but when he did, he could come out with some great zingers. After about a year or two of living with us, Roy was diagnosed with lung cancer. The disease took him swiftly, and a few months after his diagnosis, we were burying Roy. Roy had no family and no money. Only staff came to his funeral. Because he was on state assistance, the state paid for his funeral. A plain wooden coffin and a small stone with just his name on it in "potters field". I had never heard of "potters field" but I came to learn it is the place in cemeteries set aside for the poor to be buried. Even in burial there is segregation.

Other people got really sick, but didn't die. We had people with AIDS, people with kidney failure, you name it. We were not set up to be a medical facility, but we helped a lot of our folks navigate the turgid waters of the medical field. Again, because they were poor, and on assistance, if they were sick, they had to go to the clinic. There was only one clinic in town. If you had to go to the clinic you had to be prepared to make a day of it because you would have to wait for hours. Dental care was non-existent. They would give you a book of dentists taking state assistance, but when you called them for an appointment, no one was taking new patients. If any of our folks needed serious dental work, we took them back to the psychiatric hospital.

Melvin was a prime example of poignant need and lack of resources. When Melvin came to our program all he did was sleep. We tried all sorts of things to get him to work, but he wouldn't, or couldn't. He didn't have then energy. He must have had plenty of energy to masturbate as I would always see lots of porn magazines on the floor around his bed whenever I was in his apartment ( Eww! ). Melvin was a slob too. Melvin was fat and in his mid-thirties. He was poor and he was black, which made him ripe for health issues. He had diabetes and undiagnosed high blood pressure. After a few years of support from us, Melvin's kidneys failed because of high blood pressure. We ended up having to take Melvin for dialysis three times a week, and we would have to do so for ever ( or as long as Melvin lived with us ). Those who conceived of programs like ours did not imagine this sort of situation. I don't think they fully appreciated the total despair of the human condition that comes with abject poverty. Most of our time was spent dealing with all these other issues, and very little was any thing to do with their mental illness at all.

Scattered sites was finally up and running, and full. Thus, we had 8 new clients, 4 sets of two. Two people per apartment seemed to work best, financially and socially. Few people actually want to live alone. I had helped with many discharge plans and always the hospital staff would talk up how the client would have their own apartment and live alone. When push came to shove however, very, very few people wanted to live by themselves.

Two of our first scattered site clients were Tammy and Sue. They were both young women in their late twenties or early thirties. Sue was on the heavy set side and white. She was quiet and the more serious of the two. Tammy was a slender black woman who was very outgoing and energetic. They had chosen to be roommates with each other because they were friends. Transitions can be difficult times, and strain any relationship. Within a few months, Sue and Tammy were not getting along. I went over to speak with them and attempt to mediate. Their issues were the same as anyone might have experienced. Who does what around the house, finances, etc.

I was sitting with them trying to help them organize their differences when Tammy suddenly became upset. She threw a large pillow at me and ran at me. I thought she was going to attack me. However, she ran by me and on to the porch. They were living on the third floor. Tammy jumped up on the balcony and began to yell that she was going to jump. It was high enough that she would have hurt herself, but she probably would not have been killed. I went out on the porch and tried to get her to calm down. I was making little progress and I was really getting to be concerned. Tammy had a history of serious suicide attempts and had the scars on her arms to prove it. She could also be dramatic, but this time she wasn't de-escalating. When her attention was diverted for a moment I acted. I grabbed her legs and pushed outward, causing her to fall backwards. I caught her as she fell and gently guided her to the floor. Sue had already called the ambulance. I restrained Tammy until the ambulance arrived. It was only the second time ( out of three in my entire career ) that I had ever had to restrain anyone.

Another scary incident involving Tammy occurred many months later. Tammy was usually psychiatrically stable, but she had her times, as we all do. I had gone to visit her and Sue with their Casemanager from DMH. Tammy had been having some more troubles of late, after a period of having done quite well. We had been sitting around the table chatting for a while, when I noticed that Tammy was drinking something that had a funny color. She had been drinking it for most of the time we had been sitting there, but it hadn't dawned on me right away that there was anything odd about it. I reached out and took it from where it sat on the table, and said "what are you drinking?" I gave it a sniff and it had a very strong chemical smell. I quickly became very concerned. "What is this?" I asked more firmly and demanding. It turns out that she had been drinking Lysol right in front of us.

The other set of new scattered site clients were a pip. Carol and Linda. They should have been born identical twins, or they should have been married, they were such the pair. They are probably still living together today.

Carol was a little older, heavy set and gray. She was kind of a mothering type and doted over Linda. Carol was the quieter of the two. Linda was short and stocky with a Dutch boy hair cut style. They both worked part time jobs and took the bus around town to work and shop, other than that they never left their apartment, unless it was to go the doctors. They were both serious hypochondriacs. They were both on many, many medications for a range of ills, especially Linda.

Linda would wake up with a dislocated shoulder ( or so she said ) and not know how it happened. I stopped in to visit with them once a week and each week Linda had a new illness. She would go into elaborate, gleeful, detail about the nature of her illness and trips to the doctor or ER. I couldn't believe that the Doctors would just keep treating her and giving her meds without figuring out what was going on. I said to one of my co-workers one day after a visit, "one of these days I am going to go over there and Linda is going to tell me that she thinks she has brain cancer, because she is running out of illnesses". Sure enough a few weeks later Linda told me that she was being tested to see if she had brain cancer.

The funny thing was that her illnesses went as quickly as they came and she forgot all about them. Aside from this unusual life style, they were both delightful ladies to talk to and I enjoyed going over to visit, because they never caused any problems, or bothered anyone. They just wanted someone to talk to. I would go over and they would fuss over me and make tea. I tried to get them hooked up with recreational activities in the community so that could get out more, but they didn't want to go out. They were content they way they were and they lived like this for years. They are probably still living together today.

I didn't mind going around to the scattered sites apartments because it got me out of the office. I still had to move furniture, to help get the apartments set up, but I wasn't doing it quite so much at this time, thus, I didn't hate it to the degree that I had, when that was all I had been doing. We even made it fun sometimes. This one time we were helping someone move out of their apartment. They were living on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of a high rise. We had to take the elevator to move

stuff and with other people needing to use the elevator, it was talking forever. Then me and the guy I was working with hatched a plan. We would throw everything that wasn't breakable ( and eventually a few items that were ) out the window. It was low enough to be feasible and high enough to be interesting. So out the window went pillows, blankets, towels and other such items. We pulled the van up and parked it right under the window so that these things would bounce off the top of the van and thus decrease their speed, so as to not hit the ground or other people's cars. Hey, you gotta get your fun where you can find it.

There was plenty of tragedy to warrant levity when we could get it. One of the memories that stands out in my mind the most about this job was Barbara. Barbara was an emergency placement in our program. She had been living on the streets, prostituting herself, and using drugs. Barbara had AIDS and she was pregnant ( quite visibly so too ). We put her up in an apartment above my office, but she wanted nothing to do with us. In fact she was downright belligerent. She wouldn't do anything that we told her to do. She slept all day and was out all night. On a couple pf occasions when we spoke to her about the rules of the program, she attacked my staff, hitting one of them in the face. Barbara couldn't take any psychiatric medications because of her pregnancy, so she was full blown crazy to boot.

After several weeks of this, and after many pleading conversations with DMH, we decided to take matters in our own hands. Everyone in my agency felt that the woman needed to be inpatient at the psychiatric hospital. Inpatient beds were hard to come by. DMH was in the habit of getting people out of the hospital, not in. Thus, they were in complete disagreement with us, and did nothing to help us, or Barbara.

We tried many things, and eventually we were able to convince a probate judge to order her held in the hospital against her will. I can tell you for us, this was unprecedented. The problem was getting her there. I went to the court and picked up the paperwork so that I could share it with hospital ahead of time and get folks on board. We also had to pick a time when she was home, as she had been spending less and less time in the apartment.

Finally, the day came. Everyone was aware of what was going to happen except Barbara. The staff came to tell me that she was in the apartment. I then went and called the hospital, which sent an ambulance, and the police. When the police and EMS guys arrived, they were very reluctant to take her against her will, but I showed them the court order, and they reluctantly acquiesced. I took a deep breath and the whole contingent of us went up to her apartment.

She was on the third floor, and there was a narrow staircase and narrow stairs. I knocked on the door, but there was no answer. After repeated knockings, I opened the door with my key. She was asleep ( passed out? ) on the couch. The apartment, which she wouldn't let anyone into, was a mess, and it smelled. I shook her and she came begrudgingly awake. She looked around, but did not even seem to notice all the people in uniform.

I tried to explain what was going to happen, and at first she seemed cooperative. One of the female staff helped her collect some clothes, and we escorted her, without incident down the

stairs.

When we got outside, the EMS guys were holding her arm and walking her to the waiting ambulance. She seemed to be really out of it. All of a sudden she seemed to see the ambulance and her eyes went wild. She looked around and saw all the police as if for the first time. Suddenly she wrenched her arm free of the loose hold one of the EMS guys had on her, and the next thing I know she is running down the street. We all run in pursuit. She could run pretty good for a pregnant lady.

She might have gotten away from us to if it wasn't raining. The road was slick and she slipped falling on the ground with an audible "oof". The EMS guys were obviously in better shape than me, and they got to her before anyone else. When I came up a few seconds behind them, they had her in a pretty good pin. The ambulance driver, who had waited in the ambulance this whole time, brought the ambulance down the street just as the police came sauntering up. The police helped the EMS guys put her in the ambulance and away they went.

I felt bad about the whole thing. I certainly didn't relish chasing a pregnant woman down the street in the rain, and then having her tackled like a quarterback, and I didn't feel too good about what I had made the poor EMS guys do. But it had to be done. I never saw Barbara again, though I called the hospital every now and then to see how she was doing. While in the hospital she started to come around and was more psychiatrically clear, even without meds, and was doing a lot better. I later heard that she delivered an apparently healthy child too.

The thing that makes a job like this so demanding is that it never stops. It's a 24-hour a day, 365 day a year project. Like a doctor you can get called anytime day or night with problems, however, no one in this line of work earns even a fraction of a doctors pay. In addition, you are everything for these people. You are surrogate parents, counselor, financial advisor, personal assistant, driver, maid and a plethora of other functions. It never ceases to me amaze me that the most challenging people on the planet are given over to the care of people who make barely above minimum wage. The counselors have a saying "we the unwilling, lead by the ungrateful, doing the impossible, have now done so much for so long with so little, that we are now qualified to do anything with nothing". I was so taken by this saying I committed it to memory, as you can see.

It was on the night and weekends when things usually got interesting too. If you were planning on going home at 5pm on Friday, you could guarantee a crisis at 4pm. Holidays were always tough. A lot of the people we supported had no family, so we had to help them create their holiday. Also, like many others, these people often had bad recollections of past holidays. Everyone had to do extra at Christmas.

Most people with mental illness never slept well. They would be up all hours of the night. The women would usually stay in, but the some of the men would make nocturnal pilgrimages. Some just wandered around, others would go out looking for booze or drugs. Some of the people with whom I was working would look for liquor bottles on the side of the road and drink the small last drop that invariably settles at the bottom, the "backwash".



Or, like Daryl had done, try car doors as they walked down the street and when they find one that was open they would take whatever was of value to them, change, cigarette butts, cassette tapes, etc. I learned to keep my car doors locked at all times, even when parked in my own driveway!

For these reasons we instituted a policy whereby the third shift staff would actually go into everyone's apartments at night, ensuring they were in bed, and that they didn't have "visitors". We did this for awhile until DMH found out about it and complained vociferously that we were violating the clients civil rights. I can understand their concerns, but it was also a serious safety issue.

We made a compromise when our third shift guy, Frank came up with a good solution. He put tape on people's doors, that way he knew when someone had left or entered and then he would keep a close eye on that apartment. The third shift person was basically a security guard, and we had long ago given up the notion that the third shift person could sleep, as I had done. This worked fairly well, but did not provide the full level of security I would have liked. We also still had Kenny living on site. Kenny had been a "street person" and was wise to their ways, so he kept on extra eye out too.

The problems around hygiene and maintenance remained. Many of the clients, mostly the men, lived like pigs. They never cleaned their apartments. DMH continued to complain, so we had to do something. We tried having the staff work alongside the clients, but in the end the staff ended up just doing the cleaning, as the men could not stay engaged enough to follow through. Of course, the staff didn't want to do this work, so that solution failed.

Then we tried fining the offenders. That really didn't work either, because no one had much money to start with. Then we tried hiring a service, again this was a problem from a financial standpoint, but also because the services, after they saw the situation, declined to get involved. The only thing that really worked was constant badgering, and even that was only mildly successful. The clients needed us, so if we predicated some of our services, saying giving people a ride for cigarettes, a big deal for them, then we could get some compliance.

Cigarettes were more valuable than gold. Many of the clients, that was all they thought about. Many smoked 3, 4 or even 5 packs a day. One woman, Mary, had it down to a science. All she did was smoke all day, that and send money to the TV evangelists that she watched all day and night. She always had one cigarette going. She had her pack of butts and an ashtray strategically placed in front of her. One cigarette was sitting on the pack, and another was partially out of the pack. When the one she was smoking was done (and believe me she smoked it down to the filter), she lit the fresh one on the pack from the one that was smoked, put out the finished one, pull out the one that was partially out of the pack, and then rest this one on top of the pack, and pull another cigarette partially out. In this way she smoked 5 packs a day. Cigarettes had greater control over these peoples lives than heroin does over an addicts.

Almost everyone had brightly stained yellow fingers and burns in their clothing, on their tables, and on their floors. Tina the woman I had performed the Heimlich on back at the group home and moved into her own apartment. She had done well until one night she fell asleep smoking. She burned to death and burned her apartment quite seriously.

Duane was still complaining too. However, I don't know who he thought would move into a place like this. It would probably be people just like our clients, except they wouldn't be supervised. I had heard stories of people who, when they moved out of an apartment, took everything, including the kitchen sink, toilet and plumbing in the walls; all these items could be sold. That would be Duane's clientele. But he was continuing to ratchet up the rhetoric, and so we had to find someplace else to go, and move, again!

### **UP BY THE DUMP**

The real estate guy that we used to find our next location looked like he could have come out of the TV show Miami Vice. He was latino, with a penchant for fancy suits and gold chains. In was in some ways, the opposite of Duane, Duane was like Donald Trump, and this guy was Don Johnson.

We found an entire condo complex with 20 units. They were brand new. Each had two bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen/dining room combination, deck, bath and a half and a garage. They were all townhouse style, meaning lots of stairs, and while this was somewhat of a problem ( the Americans with Disabilities Act ), the price was right. The units were in an area where there were a number of other units and apartment complexes. They were also the last anything on the road to the city dump. There weren't too many places where you could easily move nearly 40 people, so we had to make some compromises.

After the deal was signed, Paul was keen to establish our presence there. He wanted something we our name on it to be on the property. I don't know why he was so insistent on this; perhaps he was afraid that the owner would renege. He took a metal folding chair, wrote "Property of the St. Andrews Society", and had me run it up there.

We began moving other things almost immediately. This time we hired a little bit more moving muscle, so things went more smoothly than they had the first time, but it was still a lot of work. We wanted to start things off right with nice new apartments, and some better furniture, so Paul hired my wife to come in and do some cleaning at 10 bucks an hour. We also threw out some of the junky furniture that folks had, and had the thrift store set us up with better junky furniture.

The only real problem with the move was Duane. He was on a rampage. We were locking apartment doors behind us as we emptied them and since he didn't seem to have the keys (or care), he was just kicking doors in and making lists of all the damage. He was in the recently vacated apartment, while my staff and the movers were in the next one. Then when he encountered my staff he gave them an earful of his anger.

We tried to clean up as best we could, it was the first thing that we did in preparation for the move, but we couldn't damaged linoleum, while we were cleaning and packing, so we would have to work something out afterwards.

By this time our relationship with Duane was not just broken, but trashed. The "working something out afterwards" became Duane suing us for something like \$40,000. He also took out an ad in the local paper, which detailed his grievances with us and basically telling everyone what bad people we were.

I didn't care. I was happy to be out of the land of drugs and prostitutes, even if where now up by the dump. The dump was a better neighborhood.

In the new place we took two of the units and made them into offices. One was in the middle and one office, the administrative office, was at the end. In the middle office condo, we turned the garage into a "community room" where the clients could hang out and we could have meetings.

The condos had lots of windows, and they were a much sunnier place compared to downtown. Everyone seemed happy about the move. Big changes were going to happen.

We also hired a new Executive Director, at least temporarily. His name was Dick ( it was actually Richard ), and he asked that you call him Dick. I was OK calling my boss "dick", it just seemed to fit.

Dick had one speed, slow. He had been a superintendent of schools or a principle or something like that. Having Dick as a boss inspired me. I thought if a guy like this can get where he is, I could become President of the Universe.

Its not that I didn't like Dick, he was a nice enough guy, but he new nothing, about what we did, so that's what he did, nothing. He got paid something like \$60,000 a year, and all he did was show up, and he barely did that. He came in every day at the crack of noon and usually left by 2pm or 3pm at the latest. Basically he was a figure head. DMH needed to see advanced credentials in the Executive Director, and Dick provided those. Otherwise, I was in charge.

We set up shop quickly. In the main office unit, we put the medication cabinet in the kitchen and a desk, and we put three other desks with some filing cabinets in the living room. The bedrooms, on the third floor, became offices. We were in business.

DMH was concerned that the upheaval would upset the clients, but they fared through everything better than the staff did.

As these changes were happening for us, other changes were happening in the mental health department of the local hospital. They had a small team comprised of two case managers, whose jobs were slowly becoming redundant. With agencies like mine up and running, and DMH doing case management too, these two folks were not needed. The hospitals were beginning to feel the financial pinch that the 80's ushered in and were looking to cut costs. Thus, these two individuals, Jim and Holly, found themselves on the street without jobs.

The hospital's loss was our gain, because both of these people were well experienced, with actual college degrees and were well respected by the folks at DMH. Jim got hired to be a "Program Director", and Holly was hired to be Manager of the group home.

\_ State cheese